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Making Magic

The Sweet Life of a
Witch Who Knows an
Infinite MP Loophole

Aloha Zachou
illust. Tetubuta



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Chapter 0: The History of the Country and the Witch's Course

"Grandest Grandmother? Are you here, Grandest Grandmother Witch?"

Within the garden in the early afternoon, as I enjoyed some tea and sweets made by my head maid Beretta, a young girl came searching for me, holding a book and a ream of paper.

"What's got you all in a hurry?"

"Mrghmph... Come here and have a cup of tea with us!"

When we beckoned to the girl, who had two old rings on a chain around her neck, she noticed us and came running over. Beretta moved from where she stood at the ready beside me and began quietly preparing a new cup of tea for our guest.

"Grandest Grandmother, I would like to ask you something!"

"Ask me something? Sure. But could you stop calling me 'Grandest Grandmother'?"

"No, Grandest Grandmother Witch is my Grandest Grandmother!"

I mean, sure, I had lived long enough that "Grandest Grandmother" fit. But it felt weird for a girl who looked physically older than me to call me that.

"Hahh... Okay. What's your question?"

"Er, yes! Actually, I was reading through my house's history books and journals, and I found mention of you, Grandest Grandmother!"

"Let me see... Ah, four hundred years ago. How nostalgic."

The girl with the questions was the descendant of my adopted daughter, who I'd saved and raised as my own. Back then, this area was called the Wasteland of Nothingness, and was still covered by the great barrier that the goddess Liriel had raised. Nowadays, that barrier was gone, and it was known as the Witch of Creation's Forest, and the descendants of my adopted children and other children I'd had custody of called me "Grandest Grandmother Witch."

"My ancestor wrote of Grandest Grandmother in this book, but the history of the Kingdom of Ischea in your library has no mention of you. Instead, I found epic tales of a saint called the Black Saintess..."

"I see. And?"

"But that Black Saintess didn't exist in the Church of the Five Goddesses at that point in time! She's clearly a lie! And though this Black Saintess had black hair, she was apparently a beautiful, mature,

matronly holy woman, unlike Grandest Grandmother!”

Saying that, my adopted daughter’s descendant held up a book which featured a large-breasted woman on the front cover. I held a hand to my chest, which had stopped growing at age twelve, and took a deep breath.

“Are you okay, Lady Witch?”

“Yes, I’m fine, Teto. I’ve already given up on the chest thing...”

After taking a few more deep breaths and calming down, I looked at the girl who’d come to ask about that period of time.

“Your mother, grandmother, and even your great-grandmother came asking about their roots, just like you did.”

“They did?!”

Thinking about how the descendants of my adopted daughter all came to me researching their ancestors once brought me back.

“Yeah. Where should I start?”

“Lady Witch, start with what this place was called back then!”

As I worried about where to begin talking about the girl’s family’s roots, Teto gave me a suggestion.

“Right. You know how this area is called the Witch of Creation’s Forest, since I can use Creation Magic? —*Creation!*” Using said magic in front of the girl, I Created a candy and held it out to her.

“Yes. Grandest Grandmother is famous on our continent.”

“But five hundred years ago, I wasn’t as strong as I am now, so I hid my power and lived as an adventurer to protect myself. I didn’t want to get caught up in any trouble, or end up the target of some political heavyweights.”

“I see...”

“While I was hiding everything, I picked up a baby... Or rather, I was entrusted with one. That was your ancestor.”

“She was so cute~! Her little hands were so puffy!”

While Teto and I spoke, the girl listened with a very serious look on her face. As I wondered what she could find interesting about an old coot like me babbling about the past, I started with the first issue she’d noticed before saying anything about her ancestor.

“The people in power are the ones who write history. Back then, I didn’t want anyone to know about my Creation Magic, and the then-king of Ischea didn’t want the same magic sparking any wars, so my existence and achievements were all credited to a fictional person known as the Black Saintess.”

“...H-huh?! So Grandest Grandmother Witch is the Black Saintess herself?!”

“The person who the Black Saintess was based on, yeah. Let me tell you all about your ancestor, so you know the truth.”

Teto and I spent that afternoon telling the story of Teto, myself,

and...my adopted daughter, Selene.

On the way to the Wasteland of Nothingness, where the goddess Liriel had reincarnated me, I had become a mother, raising a baby entrusted to my care. This was the story of how I fought to protect her, and protected her by stepping away.

Chapter 1: We Saved an Adorable Baby and Took Her with Us

After leaving Dungeon City at the beginning of spring after staying there a season, Teto and I headed towards the place where the Goddess Liriel had reincarnated me, the Wasteland of Nothingness. We'd taken tons of detours on the way to Dungeon City, so it had taken us nearly a year to get there.

Two months after leaving the city and backtracking through the path we'd taken, we made it to the outskirts of the town of Darryl, which had been the first town we'd ever visited. The age recorded on my guild card was already fourteen, and it was moving to think that it'd been nearly two years since we'd last visited.

"Lady Witch, when should we be reaching town?"

"Hmm. Looking at the map, it should be about a week on foot, but probably three days or so at our speed."

Looking at the map I'd drawn over our journey full of detours, we were nearly to our destination. But on our way, we hit a snag.

"What in the world is this vibe...?"

"Lady Wiiiitch, I can smell blood up ahead!"

As we walked along the road, we noticed a stench coming from a nearby forest, along with the sensation of mana tinged with battle tension.

"No normal bandit would have mana this sketchy! Let's go, Teto!"

"Roger!"

Mana Perception let us trace the mana to the source; there we found a bunch of people collapsed.

"So it was humans fighting each other... Some kind of dispute?"

There were some skilled-looking people on the ground, and the sketchy mana signature I'd felt had retreated as we approached. But the sketchy mana felt gross—kind of like the mana that had been clinging to the cursed magic item we'd found back in Apanemis. But I decided to leave the thinking for later, instead looking for survivors.

"Are you all okay?! Are any of you conscious?!"

I immediately used the AOE healing spell *Area Heal*, looking for signs of life. The two opposing sides of the battle were covered in slashes from blades, magic, and battle items, and collapsed on the ground dead from substantial blood loss. As I searched for any survivors, I felt someone still alive a short ways away.

“Teto, there’s someone over there.”

“I know.”

The two of us closed in on the signal and found a single woman, holding something as she slumped back against a tree trunk.

“Hahh, hahh... Who are you?”

“We’re just some passing adventurers. I’ll heal you right away. — *Heal!*”

Though I didn’t hesitate to use more healing magic, she seemed to be in a lot of pain, and was coughing up blood. That probably meant she had internal damage. Healing magic, in essence, sped up the target’s natural healing abilities. If they’d lost too much blood or didn’t have the strength left to recover, the magic wouldn’t do much.

“Hah, hah... It’s too late for me...”

“Don’t give up. Live!”

I kept talking to her and casting more healing spells, but it didn’t amount to anything but delaying the inevitable.

The woman shook her head weakly. “I am able to heal as well, so I know. I cannot be saved...” she said, holding the bundle she’d been holding in her arms out to me. “But please, just take my daughter; take my Selene...”

The bundle she held out was actually a baby wrapped in a blanket, who didn’t even look to be one year old yet.

“Get a grip. You need to live and raise her yourself,” I said, casting even more healing magic. But when her arms went limp, I quickly went to support the baby fully. And then, no matter how much I healed, I couldn’t get any signs of life back, and I realized her eyes had gone dim.

“Lady Witch... She’s gone.”

“...I see. We were too late,” I murmured as the baby started to cry, seemingly having sensed that the mother who’d protected her had passed.

It wasn’t the first time I’d dealt with seeing death up close since I’d been reborn into this world, but it still hurt to experience. If only I’d gotten here faster, I could have saved her. If only I’d had more mana, I could have used the resurrection magic from legends. But that was all just assumption.

“Are you okay, Lady Witch?”

“I’m sad. But I’m okay.”

“Wahh, wahh!”

“It’s okay. You’re fine. Don’t cry.” I lifted the infant from her mother’s arms and rocked her. “Teto, can you level the ground here a bit? We should gather up the bodies and camp here for the night.”

Even if it had been a feud between humans, I couldn’t just leave them all in the forest for monsters to eat. We set up our tent, and after

we'd made sure the baby was asleep, we gathered the bodies and their belongings.

For each corpse, with its face warped in agony, I carefully cast my spells. “—*Embalming, Clean.*”

I used a magic spell to repair the bodies of the dead—*Embalming*. Healing magic worked on living humans, while corpses were treated as objects, requiring Repair Magic. Using the church's postmortem care magic, I closed their wounds, cleaned away the blood and dirt, and put a hand to their open eyes before wrapping them up in white cloth I'd made with Creation Magic.

“Rest in peace...”

Up until very recently, I hadn't believed in gods, but I prayed to Liriel and the other goddesses to save their souls and reincarnate them just as I'd been reincarnated.

And so, after rendering what mortuary care I could to both sides' corpses, I put them all in my Magic Bag to bring them to Darryl to be buried in the graveyard there. Once I was finished with all of that, I checked through the mother's belongings.

“Is this silver? No, mythril.”

Using the appraisal magic I'd learned from the church's grimoire, I learned that the ring I was looking at was made of mythril and unicorn horn. Engraved on the inner rim was a long, noble-sounding family name.

“Selene... So your name is Seleneriel, huh? This is a memento of your mommy. We've gotta keep it safe.”

When I laid it on the palm of the baby I'd been entrusted with, the ring glowed dimly. It hadn't done anything while I was holding it, but apparently it was a magic tool that would keep the child from getting sick or poisoned while she wore it.

“Your mommy must've loved you a lot, leaving something this valuable to protect you,” I murmured, rocking the baby as I fussed about her physical condition.

The mother and her guards who'd been attacked were wearing traveler-like clothing, but they were a bit too clean for the average wayfarer. What's more, they had a Magic Bag with lots of supplies.

“Were they nobles traveling somewhere on the down-low? Or were they running from something?”

As I thought to myself, I realized that Selene's diaper was dirty, so I asked Teto to make a bath before cleaning the baby's bum with some lukewarm water. I made some baby formula powder and a bottle with Creation Magic and warmed some milk to body temperature before feeding her.

“Oh, you're so sleepy! Go ahead and sleep.”

I gently patted on her back to make her burp, then made a change

of clothes and some paper diapers with my magic and laid her down in an impromptu bed made from a biggish basket with a towel inside.

“Teto, I’m going to get our dinner ready, so watch the baby.”

“Got it! I’ll protect the baby!”

After using some wind magic to blow the stench of blood away after I’d cleaned the bodies up, I put up a barrier much stronger than what I usually used.

“If the attackers ran because they noticed we were getting close, then they must not have wanted to be seen.”

I’d also found medals representing some organization or something in the belongings of the group who seemed to have attacked Selene’s group.

Whatever the case, they’re important evidence, I thought to myself as I finished cooking up our supper and called out to Teto inside the tent. “Food’s done!”

“Welcome back, Lady Witch! The baby is just snoozing away!”

“I see. But you’re a bit loud. Let’s eat quietly.”

“*Roger!*” Teto replied in a whisper. She seemed to be really preoccupied with the baby, because she rushed to eat her food before heading right back into the tent where Selene was sleeping.

“Teto is surprisingly fond of babies, huh?”

I was thankful that we’d taken care of children at the orphanage back in Dungeon City.

And so, after I’d cleaned up our plates and headed back to the tent, I found Teto gently poking the baby’s hand with her index finger, and Selene unconsciously squeezing it.



“Lady Wiiiitch~!”

“Aah~, baah~!”

I let out a little giggle when Selene looked like she was about to cry when Teto pulled her finger out of the infant’s hand, and the former golem started fretting.

“Hee hee, you look like you’re having fun. Let’s talk about what’ll happen from now on. So about Selene...”

“What will we do? Are we gonna take her with us?”

“...Yeah. Let’s take her with us and raise her ourselves.”

Our destination was the Wasteland of Nothingness, which, as the name suggested, had nothing. We couldn’t bring a baby there. But even if we brought her to Darryl with us and left her at their orphanage, there was a high chance that the people who attacked her would attack her again.

“I see. So we’re traveling buddies. Nice working with you~!”

“Aaah!”

Teto spoke so gently to the baby.

Really, it would have been best for us to leave the baby somewhere suited for raising a child. But I felt like seeing Selene’s mother die before our eyes after entrusting her child to us had some kind of meaning.

“Now, let’s sleep here for tonight.”

“Got it!”

We spent a night in the forest after our unexpected grounding. Then, after waking up a few times through the night to deal with the baby’s crying, we started off for Darryl the next morning. Selene was strapped on my back in a sling, happily kicking her little legs, so we went at a normal pace to make sure she wasn’t burdened.

“Aah~, buu~!”

“She’s such a pretty baby. Her hair came from her mommy, so I wonder if she has her daddy’s eyes.”

Selene’s hair was the same as her mother’s, a green so dark it was nearly black, and she had bright blue eyes. When that thought crossed my mind, I decided it would be a good idea to save a lock of her mother’s hair as a memento.

“But why were the two being chased? And by what looked like assassins, at that...”

Thinking about how the attackers were part of some organization, I figured Selene might have been in the middle of some political strife within the nobility or royalty, or a child whose birth was a problem for someone politically.

But more than anything, I was worried about the sketchy mana traces...

While I was busy thinking, Selene started crying.

“Waaah, uwaaah~!”

“Ah, yeah, yeah. Time for your milk. Teto, let’s get it made.”

I fed the baby her formula, and changed her dirty diaper while I was at it.

“Japan’s baby supplies are so handy. Without them, we’d have to search for someone lactating or some goat milk as a substitute.”

Murmuring to myself, I waited for the baby to drift off to sleep before we restarted our walk to town.

We followed the highway and reached the town of Darryl much later than we’d originally planned. After the pioneering quest we took in Ottoh, taking lots of detours, and spending time in Dungeon City, we were finally back. It felt kind of nostalgic.

Teto and I kept rocking the baby as we got in the adventurers’ queue to enter town. We got a lot of looks for our very special-looking party lineup, what with me looking like a little kid holding a baby, before we finally got to the gate guard we’d dealt with back then.

“Hey, kids, the line for ordinary citizens is over there. Wait, could you be...? Aren’t you the two who killed the ogres?!”

“Ah, that brings me back. Long time no see.”

Looking back and forth between me in my black robe and baby sling, with an actual baby in it, and Teto, who didn’t look like she’d aged a day, the guard asked “...Is the kid one of yours...?”

“We picked her up a while ago!”

“Yeah, we wanted to talk to someone about that. Would there be any higher-ups in the guard station that we could talk to?”

The guard who noticed us with the baby immediately led us to the guard station and called his superiors. When said superior came, we explained how Selene’s group had seemingly been attacked in a forest off of the main highway, and that I’d stored the corpses and whatever we could salvage in my Magic Bag to bring here.

“I see, so the baby was the only one who survived the attack...”

“Yes. And we’d like to give the bodies we brought back a proper burial.”

We were asked to hold the crime-judging jewel as we explained, and since it didn’t react, they knew that we hadn’t murdered the group or kidnapped Selene.

“I understand. Then I’ll make the preparations for you. What will you do with their belongings?”

“I’ll leave most everything to the guards, but we’d like to keep the mother’s belongings and a lock of her hair, if that’s all right with you.”

“Yes. Let me show you where you can leave the corpses.”

He led us to the morgue, where I took all of the nicely fixed up bodies out of my Magic Bag and prayed they’d rest in peace. While we

were there, I left all of the things that could be used as evidence and cut a lock of Selene's mother's hair to keep as a memento.

It turned out that when the corpses were examined later, a shocking truth came to light, but by then Teto and I had already taken Selene and left town.

Once we'd finished telling them everything we knew about the incident, the sun was already setting.

"What are the two of you planning now?"

"We'll go to the inn, just like we did last time. Then we're planning on taking care of the baby ourselves."

"Teto's gotten really good at dealing with her crying overnight!"

Teto's energetic answer must have surprised Selene, because she started crying. I just gave a troubled smile as I gently soothed her.

And so, since we'd finished our talks and been allowed into the town proper, we headed to the inn we stayed at last time, only for—

"The town's heroes are back, and with a BABY?!"

After giving the inn's lively poster girl a brief explanation, we got our room and turned in for the day.

Chapter 2: At Least Say We're Adoptive Sisters

Having slept in the same room, we were awakened by Selene's crying.

"Waaahh~! Uwaaahh!"

"Nnrgh... Okay, okay. Just wait a second. I'll get your milk all ready for you."

Teto and I got up, having gotten used to things over the last few days, and we quickly got Selene's milk prepared and her diaper changed.

"I'm so thankful I can use Barrier Magic. If I didn't dull the noise with it, we would've made some other inn patrons pretty mad."

I'd set up a soundproofing barrier around the entirety of the room when the baby started crying late at night.

"Lady Wiiiitch, I changed Selene's diaper!"

"Thank you, Teto."

Teto ended up being the real MVP when it came to Selene crying overnight. I might've had the Slowed Aging skill, but my body was still that of a twelve-year-old and needed sleep. Because of this, Teto stepped up to take care of the baby overnight, which meant that I was able to get a good night's sleep.

"But yeah. Since someone's targeting her, we can't leave Selene at an orphanage, so I ended up getting carried away and deciding we'd raise her ourselves. I'm sorry for putting the burden on you, Teto."

"Why are you apologizing, Lady Witch? Teto is happy we have a new friend!"

Teto's happy smile made me smile too, and Selene picked up the vibe in the room and waved her little hands and feet happily. That just made me smile even wider, but we needed to decide what we were going to do from now on.

"Okay, so I wanted to go to the Wasteland of Nothingness, but we're probably gonna have to put that off until Selene gets a little bigger."

We couldn't take a baby on slaying quests, and there was a chance someone might try to attack Selene again, so I didn't want to stray too far from her. Still, we could probably live off of our status as B-rank adventurers and what wealth we'd accumulated up until now.

"Lady Witch. If you ask Teto, I'll go out adventuring alone. I'll

earn enough to make up for you not being there!”

“I don’t really want that though. But I’d be a bit nervous if we did the opposite and I went out adventuring while you took care of Selene too...”

While we were discussing things, we ate our breakfast at the inn and headed to the adventurers’ guild. As we walked in the door, there were a few people who knew Teto and me, and they were shocked. Both at the fact that we were back and the baby.

“Hello.”

“Hello!”

“Chise, Teto, you came back?!” The receptionist, one of our closer acquaintances, stood up to greet us.

“Yep, we did some traveling around other towns and gained a rank in Dungeon City. We arrived back in town yesterday, so we came to announce our return today,” I replied, handing her my guild card.

She checked it over and congratulated us, though she couldn’t help fretting a bit. “Congratulations on hitting B-rank! I know you two killed a whole group of ogres, but what in the world did you get up to to get to B-rank so quickly?!”

“We rose to B-rank from farming dungeon monsters for money and fighting on the front lines during a dungeon stampede.”

When we’d left the town two years before, we were D-rank, but now the both of us were B. Normally, it took adventurers five years at least to hit B-rank, so she was shocked that we’d achieved it in such a short span. Plus—

“And the both of you should still be growing, but you haven’t changed at all! And now you have a *baby*?!”

“The growing thing... Uh, can’t say much more about that except that it’s just how our bodies work. And this baby isn’t ours, we were just entrusted with her.”

After giving the receptionist a simple explanation of how Selene was the only survivor of a group that was attacked and that we intended to raise her, we added her shocked look to our growing collection.

“You’re going to be an unmarried mother. You’ve got some amazing guts, when you’re still only fourteen...”

“Um... Can’t you just call me her big sister instead?” I asked, since the impact of the word “mother” was just too much for my brain.

Selene, for her part, was napping in Teto’s arms. She had her head buried in Teto’s bountiful bust, but I couldn’t fault her, since I knew it felt nice. It was just a bit of a pity that I couldn’t calm her the same way with my own chest.

“Okay, wait, we’re off topic here... We actually came here to ask some stuff. We’re planning on raising Selene ourselves, so we’d like to

rent a house in town. And would there be any jobs we could take while we raise her?"

I knew we were asking something really self-serving, but the guild should have been able to help in situations like this. If it didn't, I figured I could open a general store or something with goods I made with Creation Magic to raise Selene on. And once we got to a point where childcare got a bit easier, we could explore the Wasteland of Nothingness where I'd been reincarnated.

"We'll do everything we can to help keep you two in town now that you're B-ranks!"

Since the receptionist answered so positively, Teto and I told her what the two of us were good at. I could use all kinds of attack and healing magic, was an old hand at all household chores, and could mix potions. Teto was good at fighting with a sword and with earth magic.

"I'll look around and see if I can find jobs that suit the two of you. Please, wait for just a bit."

And so, as we waited in the corner of the guild's pub, an adventurer trio walked in after finishing a quest and saw us.

"Ah, Chise and Teto!"

"Ah... Lyle, Anna, John."

"Chise. You forgot our names for a sec there, didn't you?"

I didn't remember their names instantly, but after a beat I remembered that they were the C-rank adventuring party the Wind-Riding Falcons—aka the Wind Falcons. Teto had her head tilted in a "who are these guys?" way as she rocked Selene.

"I heard rumors of you two being back with some problems, but a kid?"

"Yeah. We were entrusted with this baby, so we're planning on raising her."

"Seriously? You're pretty gutsy for someone so little..."

I smiled wryly, wondering if that was supposed to be a compliment, before giving them a rundown of what we'd been up to after leaving Darryl.

While we were chatting, the receptionist came back.

"There are currently no jobs available that fit your request. Would you be able to wait just a bit longer? I'm sure I'll be able to find something for you!"

"We understand. I think we'll either keep staying at the inn for a while or find a house to rent somewhere where we can raise Selene."

Bowing my head a bit, I took Selene into my arms and left the adventurers' guild. But before we left, I took out a sum of money from my guild card, so we'd be fine for the time being.

After we returned to the inn, we spent the rest of the day taking

care of Selene until evening. We had our meals brought to our room, and I gave the innkeeper's daughter a pretty good tip to keep quiet about Selene. I fell asleep in bed cuddling Selene in my arms.

???’s Side

We failed to assassinate or kidnap our targets. We were a step away from cornering them, but we had to retreat when we sensed a strong mana signature, thinking it was enemy reinforcements. But it was actually two adventurers who were just coincidentally passing by, and that woman left the baby to them before she died.

Our mission was to kidnap the targets, or if we couldn't, we needed to kill them and secure their corpses.

But the trouble was that the adventurer had a large-capacity Magic Bag, and took all of the corpses and their remaining goods with her. I had thought that we'd at least be able to collect the woman's corpse, but we failed. All of the corpses, including those of our brethren, were taken by the guards to the town's lord margrave, so we were unable to interfere.

Thinking that we ought to at least kidnap the infant, we sneaked into the inn to make an attempt and assassinate the adventurers. But

“It's no use. No matter what we do, there are no openings.”

Their room was constantly surrounded by barriers—more than one, at that: soundproofing, defense, and alert. The smaller girl seemed quite skilled, keeping them all up as she slept.

We attempted to see what was going on inside the room, looking in from the building next door, but—

“I won't forgive you if you disturb either Lady Witch's or Selene's sleep.”

We had no idea what magic she used, but the other girl was awake, and used magic to oscillate the roof tiles and carry her voice to us.

“She's a monster...!”

We hadn't been twiddling our thumbs waiting for them to reach town either. We had watched and waited for an opportunity to make our move, but one was keeping the barriers up, sleeping and waking. The other one looked as if she was sleeping, but had not actually slept for even a second over the past few days, constantly on guard.

We'd learned from their conversations at the adventurers' guild that they were B-rank, and that they'd slain ogres before, but they were even more unfathomably frightening.

With everything that had happened, our organization would be destroyed if we took any longer. But if the two were naive enough to

try to protect and raise a baby completely unrelated to them, they'd have to crack sometime.

“We just have to resolve ourselves...”

The man's murmur faded into the darkness of the night.

Chapter 3: Running from an Assassination Attempt in Broad Daylight

After returning to the town of Darryl, we spent most of our time making round trips between the guild and the inn. We'd wake up in our inn room, take Selene out shopping with us, go to the guild to search for work and somewhere to live, and then head back to our room.

During the week where we repeated nothing but that, I could sense someone watching us from afar.

“—*Sense Enemy*.”

I used one of the spells I learned from the church's grimoire, which sent a wave of mana out, allowing me to find those who were hostile or had evil intentions for us.

“Did you get anything, Lady Witch?”

“...Nope. They're taking measures against it.”

Though I knew they were watching from afar, they seemed to have countermeasures in place so that I wouldn't notice. But the tiny lingering traces of sketchy mana *Sense Enemy* showed me were most likely from the same people who had attacked Selene.

“We're dealing with whoever has that gross, curse-like mana signature.”

“What should we do, Lady Witch?”

“They'd probably be right behind us, ready to attack if we make a wrong move and try to flee town...” That meant that if we made use of places with lots of eyes like this, it would be harder for the assassins to make any moves against us.

“Aah, baah, bu~!”

“Hee hee, I wonder if something happened to make her so cheery,” I thought aloud with Selene in my arms, stopping and gently giving her a little rock. The main street was busy, with lots of passersby and shop stalls.

“Lady Wiiiitch, the grilled skewers at that stall look really yummy!”

“We just had breakfast, but...fine, you can get some.”

“Yaaay!”

Teto walked away, heading to the stall to buy her snack. Selene

and I headed to the side of the street to wait for her, only to feel the curse-like mana rapidly swell around us.

“Wait, they aren’t...?!”

I looked around, shocked that they were pulling this in broad daylight. There were tons of people around, so if they cast any magic, the people would be injured by the aftereffects.

“Die!”

The assassins leaped out of the crowd and off of nearby roofs, attacking me with spells and magic items. I quickly put up a defensive barrier to protect myself and Selene, and surrounded their magic with another barrier so that the waves wouldn’t spread any farther.

“Grhgh!”

I let out a groan at having to suddenly mount an unfamiliar defense. The battle between the exploding magic and the barrier trying to surround and hold it back became light and sound, spreading through the main street and causing a panic.

“They’re—”

Between the flashing magic and the people rushing around trying to run away, I lost sight of the assassins who’d jumped us.

“Lady Witch!”

“Teto, watch out! We were attacked!”

Just as I was yelling to Teto, a thrown knife bounced off of the barrier protecting Selene and me, but by the time I managed to turn around, they’d already fallen back and blended in with the panicked crowd.

“If I try to fight back, I’ll only end up hitting the normal citizens.”

“Are you okay, Lady Witch?!”

“I’m fi— Teto?! Your clothes!”

“They only sliced my clothes! I knocked ’em out in return!”

It seemed that the assassins had attacked Teto too, but she was holding the attacker’s dagger in one hand while the assassin lay knocked out on the ground.

“Okay, Teto, we’re gonna run.”

“Got it!”

Holding Selene with my right arm, I grabbed Teto’s hand with my left one and used flight magic. Since we flew up while still covered with barrier magic, the assassins panicked and strengthened their attacks against us, but by doing that, I was able to focus in on them.

“—*Earth Bind!*”

Giant hands made of earth shattered the town’s stone paving, grabbing and pinning the assassins.

I’d caught them with my magic, but I had no idea how many more were lying in wait around town. If they were the kind of people who would attack with no regards to the ordinary citizens around them, we

couldn't stay in Darryl. Because of that, I used my magic to fly us north out of town—towards the Wasteland of Nothingness.

“Waaahh! Uwaaahh!”

“I'm sorry, Selene. That must've been scary. The bad people are all gone. Everything's okay now.”

Once we were out of town, I landed within the forest and tried to soothe Selene after the sounds, lights, and vibes from the attack made her start crying, looking back towards Darryl as I did.

“They attacked innocent, unrelated citizens... We can't live inside the town, and there's no way we can protect everyone if we live normally.”

“Cheer up, Lady Witch. Want a meat skewer?”

Teto tried to comfort me, but when she realized she'd been attacked just as she was about to get her snack from the vendor and that we'd flown off without them, she ended up disappointed.

“Teto. Let's head to the Wasteland of Nothingness from here and calm down there for a little while.”

Holding Selene, we headed north through the forest full of monsters. After three days, we found the site of the dungeon Teto and I had cleared, and a day later we made it to the devastated lands that I had left—the Wasteland of Nothingness.

“I didn't realize this was the Wasteland, but—”

Using Body Strengthening to focus mana into my eyes, I could tell. There was an inviolable dome-shaped barrier right at the forest's border.

The barrier around the outer edge of the Wasteland of Nothingness seemed to stop people, monsters, and mana from getting inside. The parched earth hadn't changed in the last two years, with only some very hardy weeds growing inside. When I looked around, I saw that the only living beings who could go in and out of the barrier were small mammalian monsters and slimes, known as the weakest of the weak.

“I heard that only reincarnators can get in, but...”

When I touched the barrier with Teto and Selene, we were all able to pass through. Once we were inside, I noticed a difference in the atmosphere that I hadn't noticed the first time I was there.

“It's kind of hard to breathe. Or rather, the mana is really sparse.”

I didn't have much mana when I started, so I didn't realize, but the mana inside the barrier was very thin, just as the goddess Liriel told me—actually, there was next to none. And I didn't notice back then for the exact same reason, but the surplus mana my body released was bursting out, vanishing through the atmosphere.

“Are you okay, Teto?”

“Hmm? It's kind of hard to replenish my mana. But Teto has

these!” she replied, pulling out a magic stone and tossing it into her mouth.

I smiled wryly. As a member of the new earthnoid race, which evolved from golems, Teto had a Golem Core inside her body, and she could get mana back from eating magic stones or by my replenishing it with my *Charge* spell, so she wasn’t bothered.

“I see. You can regain your mana that way. But—”

“Aah, goooo!” Selena reached her little hands out, wanting the sparkling magic stone shards.

“Don’t eat them in front of Selene. If she took one and accidentally swallowed it, we’d be in trouble.”

“O-Okay! I won’t do it in front of Selene!” Teto promised, turning her back to the baby so she could stealthily eat her magic stones. It was so funny seeing her like that that I burst out laughing.

Once we’d calmed down a little, we started off again. The outer edges had a teeny bit of mana, but even the hardy weeds stopped growing farther into the center. It was a land of death, almost completely devoid of mana.

But still, this was our safe place. The assassins could never get inside. For now, we had to calm down and raise Selene here.

Lord Margrave Liebel of Darrel Town’s Side

When the guards gave me their report and I saw the corpses, I was shocked.

“This man is Sir Gaston! And these men are from the palace’s Royal Guard!”

Though their torn clothing was commoners’ garb, they were the same knights I’d met before in the capital. There were attendants and maids among the corpses as well, from what I could discern, but when my eyes fell on the last of the deceased, I was speechless.

“Lady Elize...”

The beautiful corpse was none other than the church’s saintess Lady Elize, who had wed the Kingdom of Ischea’s crown prince, becoming his concubine.

Within the church of the Five Great Goddesses, female mages who specialized in healing magic were known as saintesses. Lady Elize, who traveled throughout the kingdom healing the people and offering prayers, was the young head saintess. The noble, beautiful woman had once come to my margravate to heal the soldiers, knights, and adventurers who were injured in battles with monsters.

His Highness the Crown Prince and Lady Elize had first met on His Highness’s first monster-slaying campaign. She had been sent by the church to act as a back-line military healer, and he fell in love with

her at first sight. I had heard that after they married and she became his concubine, she continued voluntarily visiting orphanages and the like.

As an aside, there had been a time when it was widely believed that the holiness of those of the cloth was gained through avoidance of worldly desires. The notion was dispelled by a holy oracle from the Goddess Liriel—in her words, “Those of the cloth are human as well, and it is natural for them to have and raise children. While it is true that excessive lust will bring ruin, using that fact to restrain them goes against the doctrine of the goddesses.”

Within the church of the Five Great Goddesses, the Goddess Liriel was the earth mother. In essence, she was the Goddess who oversaw human intercourse. But the church at the time ignored her oracle, and in the end, documents from that period of time wrote that she brought divine punishment down upon them. Since then, saintesses and others of the cloth were allowed to satisfy their three great desires to an appropriate point, and even marry.

But getting back on topic...

Within the belongings that were brought with Lady Elize’s body were a dagger which proved that she was part of the royal family, and a mythril cross which those associated with the church used as a medium for casting magic.

There was also a letter, which I read. It seemed to be from His Majesty the King to the church in Ilzet. Devil worshippers had infiltrated the palace, and they were targeting Lady Elize in order to use her as a sacrifice or vessel to summon a great demon. The devil worshippers used illegal methods to house devils within their bodies, giving even ordinary people strength on the same level as most knights. Without the magic necessary to nullify those methods within the palace, His Majesty was requesting that the Ilzet Church help hide Lady Elize, as they had the necessary magic.

“My goodness...”

The letter went on to say that there was a high chance that they were not only targeting Lady Elize, but Princess Seleneriel, the child of His Highness and the saintess. It requested that the child be taken care of within the church, with its anti-devil countermeasures.

It seemed that the plan had been to have Lady Elize and Princess Seleneriel stay in the church until the devil worshippers had been dealt with, and then they could return to the palace. But they had been attacked on their way to Ilzet. The bodies of the assassins who had attacked them had been turned in as well, along with the worshippers’ symbols and the drugs and tools used in their devil possession.

“W-We must find and protect His Highness and the saintess’s

child, Princess Seleneriel...”

Since I had heard that the baby known as Selene had been taken in by adventurers, I wanted to have them protect and deliver her to the Ilzet Church.

But before I could do anything, I received a new report. The devil worshippers had caused a riot. The two female adventurers who had the princess had flown away out of town after using magic to capture the assassins.

I had the town locked down and all of the hidden assassins taken into custody. Those possessed by devils strengthened themselves via forbidden methods similar to cursed mana. Knowing this, I immediately sent out a request for priests who could use Purification Magic and had the guards and knights equip themselves with holy water to render the devil possessed powerless. Luckily, we were able to capture all of the devil worshippers hiding in town, and though some citizens were injured, we had no deaths.

But we couldn't find Princess Seleneriel.

Chapter 4: Let's Regenerate the Wasteland of Nothingness

Teto, baby Selene, and I began our life in the Wasteland of Nothingness.

"The closer we get to the center, the thinner the mana gets. There are no plants at all here."

The Wasteland of Nothingness was large enough to rival a small country, and we were headed to the center. Why? Because a few days earlier...

"It's been a while, Chise."

"Good evening, Liriel. Another dream oracle?"

The first night after we arrived, the goddess Liriel visited me in my dreams.

"I wonder if I should be saying welcome home first?"

"Yes, I'm home. I brought a kid with me too."

"Hee hee, I saw," Liriel said. She must have been watching us.

"We'll be staying within the Wasteland's barrier for a while to raise her."

"That's quite all right. But may I ask you to do something for me in return?"

"What is it? I'll do as much as I'm able..."

When I tilted my head a bit at her question, she touched my forehead.

"I'd like for you to release your mana here and regenerate the land, even if only when you have time."

"Ugh..."

At the same time as she spoke, information about the Wasteland flowed into my brain from where she touched my forehead. Though my ability to deal with information was increased by my Speed-Reading and Parallel Thinking skills, getting all the info on an entire small country's worth of land smashed into my mind at once shocked me awake with an awful pain.

"Hah, hah..."

"Lady Witch, are you okay? You woke up so suddenly!" Teto whispered to me when I woke up in our tent.

"I was just having a little chat with a goddess..." I answered, my brow furrowing in pain.

We hadn't been talking long, so I wasn't out of mana or anything, but the sudden rush of knowledge had given me a headache. All that info I'd been given let me understand, though. "I see. So that's an overview of the Wasteland."

The Wasteland of Nothingness was one of the regions that had lost its mana after the ancient magical civilization's rampage two thousand years earlier. Any mana in the air would disappear within seconds, making the area suck mana in like a vacuum. The speed at which it would pull mana from the rest of the world would drive the plants and animals who relied on it to extinction, and the world was nearly destroyed. The gods managed to stop this flow of mana into the region by erecting a massive barrier and cutting the land off from the rest of the world. But at the same time, the mana crisis had made mana vanish all over the world, lowering the concentration of mana in the air and causing imbalances in the leylines.

And so, the goddesses of this continent—Liriel and her sisters—had spent two thousand years repeatedly summoning reincarnators and unused mana from Earth here in order to gradually raise the mana concentration. But the difference in concentration between the inside and outside of the great barrier was still immense. While the outer edges of the Wasteland of Nothingness had some random spots of weeds, the middle had been a land of death for two millennia.

The goddess's request was for me to improve the Wasteland's mana concentration and regenerate the natural physical environment.

"The gods have limits to what they can do down here, so she asked a human like me."

Liriel gave me the knowledge of the fundamental methods to improve things. But in order to actually implement these methods, I needed to head to the center of the Wasteland. We were planning on using that area, both to raise Selene for now and as a starting point for regeneration.

With the goddess Liriel's request and the information on the Wasteland of Nothingness getting sorted out in my head, Teto, Selene, and I arrived in the center of the region.

"How's the soil, Teto?"

"Awful. It's hard and dried out, since there's no water. It isn't yummy at all."

I'd put up a barrier around us, but there were dust clouds flying around. It wasn't fit for a human to live, let alone raise a child: no tree shade to block the sun's rays and no water. The earth was packed solid and wouldn't be able to grow a thing.

Teto and I had made a temporary home for ourselves out of stone with magic, and we had Selene sleeping inside.

“The great barrier lets rain through, but the earth doesn’t even have the strength to absorb it, huh.”

“Teto could find a water vein if she tried.”

“Let’s leave that for a bit later. First, we need to do something about the ground being so hard. —*Creation*: mulch!”

I created vinyl twenty kilogram bags of leaf mulch. I kept going until I had a few tons made. But that wasn’t all we needed, so I asked Teto for help.

“Teto, can you let out all the soil you’ve been collecting up until now?”

“I’ve got lots!” she replied cheerily before turning part of her body back into soil. From the open spot poured a mass of soil, over two hundred kilograms.

Teto’s body was made of mud, and over our journeys she’d taken in fertile soil from various places. The things she ate also decomposed and fermented inside of her, and both of those things together made dark black soil. She’d also taken various useful insects and microbes inside of herself and raised them. If we used the soil she’d collected, and multiplied the bugs and microbes within it using mulch, it would all become some great starter earth for bringing the land back to life.

“This should be enough for now. I’ll mix it all up, so can you fine-tune the components?”

“Roger!”

Teto checked the composition of the soil and mulch I mixed, and ripped open other bags of mulch to adjust amounts. Then, we spread the finished soil over the wastelands at a uniform depth, moistened it with water I made with *Creation Magic*, and covered it all up with vinyl insulation to keep the moisture from evaporating.

“So how long should we wait on this?”

“About a week. That should be enough for them to multiply.”

I was so grateful that insects and microbes had enough vitality to survive in even low-mana conditions.

While we waited for the mulch to do its magic, I tried another method to regenerate the land.

“We’ll put some soil here, and—*Creation*: nut! *Grow Up!*”

I planted the nut in a bit of Teto’s soil, and after giving it some liquid fertilizer, I used *Origin Magic* to make it bud and grow quickly. The spell to grow plants, which was a combination of light and water magic, took quite a bit of mana. Just using it to grow the tree to what it would have been in a year took 1,000 MP. But doing that zapped the earth of a year’s worth of nutrients, and forcing it to grow so fast did a real number on the actual tree, making it spindly and weak. Plus, forcing it to grow also made its life span much shorter than a normal tree.

I planted a number of trees like that at regular intervals around our temporary home.

“That should be okay for a shelterbelt and some organic cultivation, for now.”

The wind in the Wasteland of Nothingness was wild due to the lack of any windbreaks, and the ground’s moisture evaporated in a snap. I didn’t want the soil whose microbiome we’d put the effort into enriching to dry out, after all. Plus, even if the speed-grown shelterbelt trees only lived for a little bit before falling, their roots would break up the hard ground a little bit. We could also smash the fallen trees up and mix them with soil so the microbes could break it all down and make new soil.

“If we keep repeating this all bit by bit, I wonder if we could grow a forest?”

“It’s a little first step.”

I at least wanted to make the area green enough by the time Selene reached an age where she could start forming concrete memories.

Chapter 5: Life in the Wasteland of Nothingness

Nights in the wastelands were incredibly cold. With nothing for shelter, any heat that accumulated during the day was quickly stolen away. Since our temporary stone house lost heat easily too, I had to put an insulating barrier around it to keep the environment stable. What's worse, the trees I'd speed-grown in these awful conditions all fell within a few days.

"Yeah, forcing them to grow made it so their roots weren't well spread, so they couldn't do much against the conditions here."

But by falling, their roots had broken up the ground about ten centimeters under them. I used magic to move the fallen trees, planted more nuts, added mulch and some liquid fertilizer, watered everything, then used magic to speed-grow everything all over again. The replanted trees were rooted much better this time, and I smashed the fallen ones and mixed the chips up in the microbial soil.

"This is about all we can do for now. Let's get back in the house."

"Got it."

And so, we kept on living cut off from the rest of the world. We kept planting more trees, and the Wasteland of Nothingness was starting to shape up.

For the first month, I was kind of confused as to why the trees died and fell really quickly after being grown, but this was a nearly mana-free region. One of the properties of mana was that it flowed from dense areas to thin ones. Because of that, all of the mana the trees would put out ended up flowing out into its surroundings, draining all the mana and killing it. So I erected a barrier that inhibited the flow of mana in a hundred-meter radius of our house in the Wasteland and started filling it with my mana. Every day, I spent my mana managing the barrier, pouring mana out of myself to increase the mana density, and eating more strange fruit to increase my mana pool further. And with all of that work, the area around our house began gradually growing more stable. The seeds mixed in with Teto's soil also began sprouting, growing moss. This allowed slimes, which lived off of mana and water, to start naturally spawning.

"Plants and slimes give off mana too, even if it's just a tiny bit."

They took in mana, multiplied it further, and took even more in. Starting with that little regenerative cycle, in three months, the area

around our house had the same mana density as outside of the Wasteland of Nothingness's great barrier.

"Wait, if it's gonna go like this, isn't regenerating gonna be super easy?"

I tempted fate with those words, and an incident occurred.

"Ah..."

I accidentally let the mana-inhibiting barrier around the house drop. And just like that, all of the mana that had been inside of it dispersed through the wastelands. The slimes lost their mana and dissolved, moisture was sucked into the ground, and all of the trees and plants died.

"Aaah, everything we did to make a starting point for regenerating everything..."

"Keep trying, Lady Witch. We still have time!"

All the mana I'd managed to cultivate in that tiny sliver of the Wasteland had been let out all at once, to no effect whatsoever on the region as a whole. It all felt fruitless, like a drop of water in an empty bucket.

"No, I'm fine. I'm starting to get the know-how for regenerating this region. I'll definitely get it next time."

Then Teto and I worked together to remove all the dead trees and remake the barrier. This time, instead of the barrier being reliant on my mana, I used independent magic tools to put the barrier up around the house. The sixteen stone pillar-shaped barrier tools I made with Creation Magic increased how much I had to walk around the area to refill them every day. But they all worked together to keep the barrier up, so I set things so that even if one broke somewhere, the others would keep the barrier going.

Thus, we were able to restart regenerating the grove and letting mana out to increase the area's density. Every day, I ate one strange fruit, and since I also used nearly all of my mana for regenerating the wasteland, my mana pool was growing well. Plus, since I had the know-how now, I was able to bring things back to the point they were at before in just two months this time.

And then, something touching happened. "It's amazing. The slimes are spawning naturally again, and the moss is back too."

"And the seeds left by the other plants are starting to sprout again!"

Though all the plants had wilted when the barrier fell and all the mana dispersed, the moss must have only *looked* dead, because with some mana, water, and nutrients, it came back to life. The plants had also left seeds in the ground, and they started sprouting in the dead grass.

While we were regenerating the Wasteland of Nothingness, Selene

was quickly growing in the house. When her mother first gave her to us, she'd only been about six months old. Then, she started being able to hold her head up, rolling over and sitting up, and was crawling around to run away from us too.

"She really is so lively."

Once Selene was able to move around on her own, I realized that our stone house made with magic had dangerous things like table corners that could hurt her if she fell, so we rebuilt the house. This time, the house was built with wood and stone arrangements made with Creation Magic, and all the furniture had rounded corners for her safety.

"Let's eat, Selene. Say ahhh!"

Since Selene was teething now, I was gradually starting to feed her baby food I made with Creation Magic. Though finding any food in the Wasteland of Nothingness was hopeless, I was able to make food with Creation Magic. In particular, the jars of baby food I made had a good nutritional balance and lots of different flavors and types for Selene to eat. For clothes, I could just *Create* more as she grew, so I was super grateful to be able to deal with a quickly growing child.

What's more—

"Selene. Drink this too, okay?"

"Buuuh~!"

"Oh, don't fuss. You just have to swallow it down quick."

Among the herbs and mushrooms I'd gotten in Dungeon City were the ingredients for medicine to raise an infant's immune strength, so I made some of the prophylactic medicine for Selene and had her drink it. One dose would work for half of a year, stopping any illnesses or infections from getting too serious. Though Selene had that mythrill ring that was enchanted to purify and counteract poisons, I still had to make her drink the medicine. It was my duty as her parent.

And just like that, three years passed as we regenerated the Wasteland of Nothingness and raised Selene.

Chapter 6: I've Finally Become Forever Twelve

Over the past three years, the middle of the Wasteland of Nothingness had become quite verdant. The grove of trees that had only spread around a hundred meters from our house had gradually expanded as we planted more trees.

Once we had the environment settled, mana would generate more mana. Every day, I let out mana, and the plants sucked that up and made even more mana, causing the mana density within the barrier to get quite high.

If it got too dense, there was a chance of it spawning strong monsters or causing a dungeon to appear. But I couldn't just drop the barrier that kept all the mana from escaping, because we'd just have a repeat of what happened last time. So, in order to avoid any sudden changes in the environment, I set up more barrier tools outside of the original hundred-meter radius and raised a second barrier around it. Then I gradually spread the dense mana through it, trying to equalize the concentration of mana and planting more trees in it.

"Argh, dealing with the barrier tools is starting to get hard."

I'd taken the first set of barrier pillars down, but by increasing the area covered, we were now up to about eighty pillars, which I had to refill with mana one by one. It was really turning into a pain in the ass.

Then, during our first winter while all the plants had stopped growing, I left Selene in Teto's care and went searching the Wasteland on my own only to find some ruins buried in the ground. Though most everything aboveground had been blown away in the rampage, there was still a facility underground.

While I wanted to explore it further some day, I ended up finding something valuable.

Within the facility were documents regarding control devices the ancients used with their magic tools. If I used these magical control devices, I could deal with the pain-in-the-ass barrier generators all at once.

Quickly rushing back to our home base in the Wasteland, I used Creation Magic to make magical devices to send mana, and one more to control them. It was ironic that the knowledge and technology from the ancient civilization that had caused the whole mana drought

would play a part in regenerating the mana and forests.

“Great. I’ll be able to cut down on my patrols with this.”

The control device would check the status of all of the other magic tools that were connected to it, and let me immediately see which ones were damaged or had stopped working. But while managing them all got easier, some mana would be lost while I topped the pillars off.

Before, when I had to go to each barrier pillar one by one to refill them, it took about twenty thousand MP total. By linking them all together, the total mana I had to send went up to about forty thousand MP a day, including what would be lost through attenuation. But, since that lost mana would be dispersed through the air and help raise the Wasteland of Nothingness’s mana density, none of the mana was actually wasted.

“This is as far as the forest can grow for now.”

“Lady Witch? We can’t make it any bigger?”

“If we expand it too much, I won’t be able to manage all of the barrier devices, and I’d just end up having the same problems I was running into before.”

Right now, the plant life we’d grown emitted only enough mana to fill the inside of the barrier, and my own mana pool was still growing. The Wasteland of Nothingness was 2,500 square kilometers. The little forest I’d made wouldn’t cover even a hundredth of the whole thing.

“I need to make the forest regeneration more efficient.”

“Lady Witch, you have tons of time. Let’s do it slowly!”

“That’s true, Teto. But I still need to figure out a new method sometime soon...”

In these three years, the environment around us had become fairly regulated.

“Mama, Big Sis Teto! Butterfly!”

With the environment sorted out, we cut down a little bit of the forest to make a small field for a kitchen garden and expanded our little house of stone and logs. Selene, age three, had caught a butterfly that landed on a wildflower growing in the field, and was running towards us. She was a lovely little girl, with long, dark green hair, and I looked forward to her growth more than regenerating the forest.

Then—

“Ah...”

“Ah...”

Selene let out a little sound as she realized she tripped, and both Teto and I also made little sounds as we sensed she was about to fall. And so, she stumbled and fell down. She’d had the butterfly in her hands, but she released it so she could put her hands out to stop her

fall. The butterfly fluttered up over her head and flew off somewhere.

“Are you okay, Selene?”

“UWAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH,
MAMAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!”

“It’s okay. That must have hurt. Show mama your hands and knees.”

I scooped Selene up off the ground and soothed her. She’d scraped herself a little bit when she fell, and the wounds had a bit of dirt and some blood. I used magic to clean them and healed her.

“Pain, pain, go away! See? It doesn’t hurt anymore.”

“...Yeah. It doesn’t hurt.”

“You’re so brave, Selene. You stopped crying right away. You’re such a strong girl!”

“Eheh heh... Big Sis Teto praised me.”

I hugged the girl while Teto praised her. Our daily life centered around Selene like that as we regenerated the forest.

Selene recognized me as her mother, and she adored Teto like an older sister. From a size and appearance perspective, I thought *I* looked more like a sister, but Selene loved me as her mama.

“Your real mommy entrusted you to me before she died. This is a lock of your mommy’s hair.”

I had explained that and showed her the lock of hair I had cut from her mother’s head back before Darryl was attacked, but she didn’t understand that well. But she did seem to recognize that she had a birth mother, and that I was the mother who raised her.

“What are you guys doing, mama?”

“Hm? Today, we’re going to plant a new tree.”

“A new tree? Let Selene help you!”

“Okay. You can help.”

Having realized that I was reaching the limit of how much I could regenerate the forest with my own mana, I was trying a different method: making a new type of tree with Creation Magic.

Before I made a handy-dandy herb that just happened to have soap-like properties, and this time I was going to make a tree that would release a lot of mana—a World Tree.

Teto used a scoop to dig and soften the ground; then Selene planted the walnut-sized seed I’d made beforehand, and used a watering can to sprinkle it with water mixed with liquid fertilizer. Finally, I put a little bit more mana into the ground so that it would sprout more easily before we planted more uniformly around the forest.

Once evening came around—

“Ma...ma...”

“Hee hee, how cute.”

“Lady Witch is cute, and Selene is cute too!”

“One day, she’ll be bigger than me and leave the nest.”

After we planted all the tree seeds, Selene fell asleep as I carried her on my back. She was exhausted.

Over the three years we’d spent raising Selene, I hadn’t grown even a little bit—actually, my growth had stopped. I needed mana for regenerating the Wasteland of Nothingness, so I’d kept eating strange fruit to increase my mana pool. When my mana pool crossed over 50,000 MP, a certain skill was added to my status.

That skill was Unaging.

NAME: Chise (Reincarnator)

CLASS: Witch

TITLE: Goddess of the Pioneer Village, B-rank Adventurer, Black Saintess

LEVEL: 80

HP: 2,500/2,500

MP: 13,000/53,000

SKILLS: Staff Martial Arts Lv 4, Origin Magic Lv 8, Body Strengthening Lv 6, Mixing Lv 4, Mana Regeneration Lv 7, Mana Control Lv 8, Mana Isolation Lv 6, various others...

UNIQUE SKILLS: Creation Magic, Unaging

The Slowed Aging skill had already done exactly what it said, but now I’d become an eternal twelve-year-old, just as I’d feared. Now, Selene would eventually out-age me.

But dropping that subject for now, I’d been worrying about something else recently instead.

“Okay. Once these World Trees grow, I’m thinking we should move, for Selene’s sake.”

Teto, Selene, and me living alone was horribly unhealthy from a societal standpoint.

When the World Trees grew and started producing enough mana, I was planning on adding a new function to the barrier devices: the ability to continue operating by absorbing mana from around themselves.

It took around 40,000 MP to keep the eighty barrier devices going. We’d planted all of those high-output World Tree seeds in order to supplement the mana the other plants and trees created. With them, I wouldn’t have to check on the devices every day, and I could instead get by with checking them regularly a couple of times a year.

And so, in the third year since we began regenerating the Wasteland of Nothingness, the World Tree seeds sprouted, and they

produced more mana at the seedling stage than I'd expected. One seedling let out about 1,500 MP a day, and I was able to cover all the mana necessary for keeping the barrier up with just thirty saplings. They also stayed verdant through the winter instead of withering, continuing to steadily produce mana. Once they grew more, they'd probably let out even more mana in a single day.

I set the barrier devices to keep the mana inside the barrier at a set density, and release the excess into the Wasteland of Nothingness.

Having prepared for any problems that might happen while we were away, we made plans to move our base to the southeast, close to the outer edge of the Gald Beastman Nation.

Chapter 7: We Moved to a New House

Thanks to the self-recycling barrier device system created by planting the World Trees, things improved immediately. The trees could grow even in low-mana environments now, and what's more, they shed mana in spades.

By planting World Tree saplings in various places around the Wasteland of Nothingness and setting up independent barrier devices which ran off of the ambient mana of the World Trees, I made mana production hot spots. The devices were set up so that they'd automatically grow based on how much mana they took in, so little groves would pop up centered around the World Trees and barrier devices.

"It's easy to do, once you've got some know-how about planting trees and mana production."

"It's all because of how hard you've worked, Lady Witch."

"It's thanks to your help too, Teto."

Teto and I were spreading nutrient-rich soil, along with plant and tree seeds, around the World Tree mana hot spots. The seeds would sprout, spread, and gradually make the area capable of sustaining its own plants.

Though each mana hot spot itself was small, by placing them throughout the Wasteland of Nothingness, the mana there was steadily increasing.

In much the same way that the Wasteland was developing, Selene's own upbringing was undergoing its own changes.

"We need to have Selene meet humans other than us soon."

Living in the Wasteland of Nothingness meant that Teto and I were all she had, so her social skills were out of whack. If we didn't have her deal with some other human beings soon, her mental balance might suffer in the future, so we set up a World Tree grove and mana production spot near the border with the Gald Beastman Nation and decided to move to the new home we built there.

"Selene, we've decided we'll be moving to a house close to town so we can visit."

"There are tons of people in towns!"

"A town?! Selene wants to go!"

We'd already taught her through things like picture books that

other humans existed, so the move went smoothly.

And then, at the mana hot spot near Gald that we moved to—

“Mama, big sis Teto, I’m going!”

Wearing a straw hat to keep the sun off of her face, and with a cute little pouch hanging from her shoulder, Selene cheerfully set off to go for a walk around the new grove.

“Don’t go too far, Selene. Come home in time for your snack.”

“It’s okay, Lady Witch! She has escorts!”

I was worried that she might rush and trip like last time, but Teto calmed me down as dolls walking on two legs paraded out from behind the house.

“Misser Golem! Hi!”

“Go!”

The clay golems that had been working on the fields this morning lifted their hands in greeting.

Children were interested in a lot of things. Flowers and grass, dirt and rocks on the ground, the harmless slime monsters that naturally spawned...and the golems.

Teto had created them to help with farmwork and planting trees. When Selene first saw them, she hugged them with no regard for if she’d get dirty, and started playing with the mud the clay golems were made from. Then...

“Mama, Teto, look! Issa bear now!”

“Wha, Selene?! What are you doing?!”

We’d been watching her play in the mud with smiles on our faces, but then she made the clay golem bend down so she could plop two mud balls on its head and call it a bear.



"I'm sorry. You can take them off if you don't like them."

"Oooh, you're so stylish! That's great!"

"Goooh!"

"Mama, big sis Teto, he likes it!"

And so, the clay golems that had become Selene's playmates gained a more bearlike silhouette, which they seemed to appreciate. Ever since then, all of the golems started adorning their heads with mud balls of their own making; we'd stumbled into our own trademark golem design.

"Let's play, everyone!"

"Go!"

And at this very moment, Selene was leading those bear golems with their mud ball ears off to explore.

"Hey, Teto..."

"What's up, Lady Witch?"

"Is it just me, or are the golems kinda starting to grow mentally? Like, that they're picking up a sense of self, I mean."

From my knowledge, golems were magical constructs that dutifully followed set commands, but it felt like the work golems Teto had made were getting more humanlike by the day. They were getting happy about the mud balls on their heads, bending down to meet Selene's eyes, and sometimes even shrinking themselves down to a height near hers.

"It's not your imagination."

"Ahh, yeah, huh. Highest likelihood is spirits, maybe..."

Staring into the distance, I thought back to when we were in the pioneer village. Back then, when we'd been growing soap plants in pots, Teto's care had suffused them with mana and made them birth spirit-like things. Since the golems she'd made used her mana and mud she'd prepared, it reminded me of the potted spirit incident. Maybe one day, those clay golems could become earthnoids just like Teto, or full-blown spirits.

"Well, if it happens, it happens."

"Lady Witch, they call that procrastinating!"

Teto might have been right that I was just putting off the problem, but even if it *did* happen, it wouldn't actually be a negative. It'd be nice if Teto didn't have to belong to a species of one forever, and if a spirit was born here in the Wasteland of Nothingness, it'd help regenerate the rough land. But with the Wasteland's current mana density, anything like that was probably pretty far off.

Seeing Selene off as she went to go play with the clay golems, I busied myself by getting things ready for us to go to Gald.

Chapter 8: Going to Town with Selene

“Since Selene needs to interact with human beings other than us, we’ll be going into town today.”

“You need to be friendly with other people.”

“Okaaaay!” Selene responded cheerily.

I’d done some preliminary research on the nearest town; I knew where it was, and that it was a border town with an evenly split population of humans and beastmen. While the country itself was founded by and for its beastman population, it had a good number of humans like Selene too, so it would be easy for us to get by.

“Got our money, got potions for trading, got the rest of the kit... Let’s go. Teto, you hold the fort while we’re gone.”

“Roger!”

“Mama, your hat! You’re a witch, so you can’t forget your hat!”

“Ah, sorry. Thank you, Selene.”

As I checked the things inside my magic bag and we were about to set off, Selene handed me the wide-brimmed pointed hat. I grabbed the broom in the entranceway instead of my staff, and the both of us hopped on.

“Wow, we’re flying!”

“Be careful you don’t fall.”

Selene, who was cheering and laughing, had always dreamed of flying brooms. All of the books I’d collected while we’d been journeying were still too hard for a child like Selene to read. Thus, I’d used my Creation Magic to create the picture books I knew of from my past life on Earth and translated them into this world’s language. Among those picture books was one where a witch in a pointed black hat and a black robe got on a broom to fly through the sky, and Selene had questions for me when she linked that appearance and my own.

“Mama, you’re a witch, right?” she’d asked from my lap as I’d read her a story.

“Hm? Yeah. Why?”

“But you aren’t like the witch in the book! You can’t be a witch if you don’t have a hat!”

When she pointed out that just having a hooded robe didn’t make me a witch, we made a proper pointed hat together... Though Selene’s participation didn’t amount to much other than watching, since it was

too dangerous for a child her age to be working with scissors or a sewing needle. After a month's work, we'd made a witch's hat.

Then, another time—

“Mama, you don't fly?”

“I can fly. —*Fly!*”

“No! Not like that! Like this!”

I cast my flying spell to show her, but she strongly objected, opening a picture book wide in front of me. On the page she opened, a witch was riding a broom through the night sky. By “fly,” Selene specifically meant flying on a broom.

After that, I created a broom-shaped flying magic tool and the spells I needed to control it... I worked pretty hard to protect Selene's dream. But, handily enough, flying using a broom as a medium instead of the usual flying magic directly increased my speed and lowered the overall mana expenditure.

As I thought back over my days getting ready to go to town with Selene as the two of us passed over a forest. An hour's flight in a straight line from the house brought the walls into view.

“Mama, big walls!”

“That's the town. Let's walk in from a short distance away.”

Selene and I landed outside of town, entered through the gate, and looked for the adventurers' guild. We got there after asking a town guard and walked inside.

“Hey, little girl. The guild isn't somewhere you should be bringing small kids. It's not a playground. Go home,” chided a male adventurer who was near the entrance.

Selene had been super excited to see lots of people, but having a man bigger than Teto or myself towering over her scared her. Though she'd learned that from books that men existed, it seemed the real thing came as a shock to her.

“Mama...”

“It's okay. You don't need to be scared,” I said to soothe Selene, before turning to firmly deal with the adventurer. “We registered in the next country over, and though I haven't worked lately, I am still an adventurer.”

“Looks like you've got a real guild card. But you shouldn't be bringing a kid with you.”

“We just moved somewhere nearby, so I'm only here to say hello. I wouldn't bring her on any actual questing.”

We spoke a bit more, but the adventurer wouldn't back off, saying what he did out of kindness. I let out some mana to overawe him. It seemed that there was a limit to the mana you could cover yourself with or let out with Body Strengthening, no matter how much mana you actually had. But, even though it was the first time in a good

while since I'd done it, I didn't go overboard, and the adventurer was able to get how strong I was.

"O-Okay, I get it. Sorry for bothering you."

"Thank you for your understanding," I replied with a little smile as we continued past, and Selene tilted her head a bit at the man's sudden change in attitude.

And so, we made it to the reception counter, where a catwoman was waiting.

"What business do you have with us today? Would you like to join the guild, or are you here to post a quest?"

"For now, I'd like to take some money out of my guild card. I also wanted to know if there was anywhere in town that could watch children."

"Huh? Ah, okay. Please wait one moment," the receptionist said as her eyes widened at the amount of money on my card. Then they widened a bit more when she saw that I was B-rank. Then...

"E-Eighteen?!"

"Yes. Is there a problem?"

I'd registered for the guild at twelve, and we worked in the kingdom of Ischea for about two years. After that, we'd had Selene for four more years, so officially I was eighteen. But it was a bit of a new experience for me, having someone shocked at the difference between my age and appearance.

While the receptionist stood there in shock, Selene tugged at my clothes.

"Mama... I gotta pee..."

"I'm sorry, but would you be able to direct us to the bathroom, please?"

"Ah, yes. It's over there... Wait, *mama*?! Uh... Really? You're parent and child? Not sisters?"

"I'm the mother raising her, yes. Her real mother passed away."

"I-I see..."

The fact that I was a B-rank adventurer at eighteen, who looked like a twelve-year-old, who also had a non-blood-related child had shocked not only the receptionist, but the woman and adventurer at the other counter, plus all of the employees out back too. I just ignored them all and took Selene to go potty. When we got back, the receptionist was still a bit dazed.

"Um, how much would you like to take out of your guild card?"

"For now, could you give me one small gold broken down into silver and coppers?"

"All right. And if you're looking for somewhere to temporarily leave your daughter, there's a nursery school for adventurers with children. Other than that, there would be the orphanage, the church

on the sabbath, or a private school.”

“I see... Would I be able to leave her at the nursery school next time I come to town?” I asked.

The receptionist handed me the information booklet.

“This is the cost for one time.”

Two silver was a lot for a day’s childcare, but it was probably because the facility was for higher-ranking adventurers. Running the nursery school was a lifesaver for high-ranking adventurers who would otherwise be unable to work because of their children, and it would also protect their children, who could be thought of as their weak points. Things could get bad if somebody made off with the kids as leverage against an otherwise powerful parent. The daily fee probably included guarding the kids while their parents were off doing quests.

As I was reading through the booklet, Selene tried to read along with me, but it looked like the contents were a bit difficult for her. After pouting for a bit, her eyes strayed to the receptionist’s head... Or rather, the ears on top of it.

“...Your kitty ears are cute.”

The childish comment got a smile from the receptionist, and I continued for Selene.

“Yes, they’re lovely, aren’t they?”

“They’re all wiggly and cute!”

“That lets them pick up sounds well. They call that having good hearing.”

“You’re amazing, miss!” Selene’s carefree smile spread warm vibes through the guildhall.

After taking the money from my guild card, and applying to the nursery school for Selene, we went shopping. I could create whatever we needed with Creation Magic, but I didn’t want her to think that things naturally appeared out of nowhere, so I showed her how to use money.

“Mama, it’s a toy puppy! It’s cute!”

“Yes, it is. Excuse me, how much for the plush?”

“That’d be a silver and a half.”

Though the fabric it was made of was kind of coarse, it seemed that Selene had taken a liking to the brown dog plush. I could’ve made a better quality one with Creation Magic, but since I wanted to get Selene to get attached to objects, I bought it for her.

“Okay, Selene. Can you count out the money and pay by yourself?”

“Selene can do it herself! Um, one silver, and... One, two, three, four, five large copper!”

After counting it out properly, Selene handed the money to the

man at the general store, then took the plush. She was so cute, hugging the doggy plush with both arms. She was an angel.

“Selene. We don’t want to get it dirty, and it would be dangerous for you to walk with both your hands full, so let’s put it away for now.”

“Okay. See you later, Harry!”

It seemed that she’d already named it—after a dog from one of the picture books I’d given her, at that.

After shopping like that, Selene and I left town in the afternoon, hopping back on the flying broom to head back to the Wasteland of Nothingness. She nodded off on the broom midway, tuckered out, so I gently held her as we went home to Teto.

Chapter 9: One Day, We Met an Ant in the Forest

And so, our life of going to town two or three times a week continued. I left Selene at nursery school to learn how to socialize while I took quests from the adventurers' guild, picked herbs that grew outside of the Wasteland of Nothingness's great barrier, and made potions from those herbs to sell.

In the middle of all that—

"Mama, do carpets fly in the sky?"

A few days after reading *Aladdin and the Magic Lamp* as her bedtime story, Selene asked me that, looking down at the wet towel spread under her feet after her bath.

"That was a special carpet. Normal carpets don't fly."

"Okay..." she'd murmured, looking downcast.

First a flying broom, now a flying carpet, huh...? I thought to myself, looking up at the sky.

That said, it was a convenient answer to the problem of getting all three of us in the air to travel; the broom couldn't take Teto's weight on top of ours, but a carpet might cut it. I'd already learned all of the gravity-handling bits from when I made the broom, and they carried over pretty well. I also Created thread that conducted mana really well and stitched the magic circles into the base carpet. Doing that every night, it still took about two months to finish.

"Yaaay! A flying carpet! Now big sis Teto can come to town too!"

A dry smile rose to my lips at her reasoning as Selene cheered.

"You're so nice, Selene. Teto is happy!"

"That tickles, Teto!"

Teto gave Selene lots of praise, gently hugging her tight. I gazed at her as she giggled cutely, but we had plans for the day.

"Okay, we'll be taking Teto to town with us from now on."

After all three of us got on the flying carpet, we flew over the forest as usual, heading to town. But—

"Mama, what's that?"

"Yeah, I see it. Teto, you take care of Selene!"

"Roger!"

As we neared town, we saw something black squirming at the forest's edge where it bled into the nearby plains. I stopped the carpet in the sky and jumped off. Taking my trusty staff out of my magic bag,

I flew after the thing that Selene had pointed out.

“Do you guys need some backup?”

“I don’t know who you are, but yes, please! It’s a small-scale stampede!”

“All right, take this then! —*Ice Lance!*”

The things that were trying to get out of the forest were several hundred formic horrors—grand ants.

I dipped deep into my 50,000 points of mana and barraged the monsters from above with a rain of ice lances. The D-rank grand ants tried to intimidate me, fixing me in their compound gazes and spitting acid from maw after gaping maw, but my barrier blocked it all. I just turned up my output and mowed through them.

In a short three minutes, I’d slaughtered the entire monster stampede, and after making sure to check for stragglers, I landed.

“Are you guys all okay?”

“You’re...that one with the daughter.”

“Chise the Witch, B-rank Adventurer.”

Seeing that I had slaughtered a full B-rank monster stampede on my own, the adventurers all seemed to get how strong I was, despite my appearance.

“Thanks for the assist. If we’d gone up against that many monsters at once, we would’ve sustained a ton of casualties.”

“I see. Well then, I’ll be heading to town.”

“Hey, wait!”

I’d tried to leave the rest to the other adventurers present, but they stopped me.

“What?”

“What do you mean, what? What about butchering the monsters for their magic stones or carapaces?”

“You guys can have it all. I have to drop my daughter off at nursery school,” I replied, giving a little signal so that the flying carpet I’d left up in the sky came down a short distance away to pick me up.

“Wow, mama! You beat them all up!”

“Yep. Now all the scary ants are gone, so let’s get you to see your friends.”

“Kaaay!”

“Anyway, that’s that, so...” I said, hopping onto the flying carpet and heading towards town before the adventurers could say anything else. But Teto looked back at the grand ant corpses and quietly whispered the words “magic stones,” making me regret not taking a few for her.

The guards at the main gate already knew me, but Teto, as the newcomer among us, gave them a little self-introduction. Then we headed to the nursery school.

“Okay, Teto and I are going to work, so you be a good girl and wait for us.”

“Okaaay! I’ll go play with Kyal and Touli!”

The nursery school was for the children of high-ranked adventurers, but older orphan children came to help out. Selene had made friends with two similarly aged little girls who were also dropped off by their parents. Kyal was a catgirl, while Touli was a doggirl. Both of them were adorable, and it warmed my heart to see them playing nicely with Selene. But there was no shortage of cruel children and little boys with mischief on their minds, so I tried to avoid leaving her on days that they’d be there. I also told her that she could always run away if she didn’t like them.

“But don’t I have to get along with everyone?”

“It’s hard to get along with everyone. If you have to deal with people you don’t like, it’s okay if you put some distance between yourself and them and run away, instead of forcing yourself to deal with them.”

I’d had that talk with Selene back when she’d first started going to nursery school. She didn’t quite accept it, but I hoped she’d take it to heart in time. But she’d steadily gained more social skills and was having a blast every day at school.

“Well then, let’s get ourselves to the guild.”

“Okay!”

After dropping Selene off, Teto and I headed to the adventurers’ guild, where we were immediately called over by the receptionist as we tried to approach the sales counter.

“Chise! Great timing! We just got an urgent quest!”

“Urgent quest?”

“A colony of grand ants has been spotted coming from a small-scale stampede! It’ll hit the town at this rate, so they need to be slain!”

Since the adventurers’ guild dealt with Demon Dens, small-scale stampedes weren’t uncommon. This time, it was a compulsory quest for adventurers D-rank and up, which meant it was compulsory for me too as a B-rank.

As the receptionist yelled to me that I needed to go help if I’d gotten Selene dropped off already, I just let it go in one ear and out the other.

“Ahh, there’s no problem anymore.”

“What do you mean no problem?!”

“On our way here, I saw some adventurers fighting them, so I stopped to help. They’re probably finishing up butchering the corpses and hunting for any surviving ants now. Here are today’s potions and herbs for turn-ins. Please square up the accounts,” I said, taking item after item out of my magic bag. “Someone’ll probably be here soon to report about it all,” I continued, before going to rest in a corner of the

guild while they counted everything.

A bit later, an adventurer's familiar or something flew in through the guild's open window and gave an employee a letter.

"I'm so sorry about what happened before," the receptionist told me afterwards. "Thank you so much for your assistance."

"Oh, it's all fine. I saw them on my way to drop my daughter off at nursery school, after all. I couldn't leave a situation where people might get badly hurt in front of her."

"But still, thank you. Once we get things confirmed, we'll pay you for the slaying quest."

But for all the panic the guild was in, adventurers who'd been up against the grand ants weren't very strong for a group sent on a compulsory quest.

"Did something happen with the guild?"

"To be honest, the lord of this region took most of the higher-ranked adventurers to deal with a pack of wyverns that appeared in the northeast..."

"I see... Not much you can do about that."

It was no surprise that a high-risk, high-reward gig like that would eat up all the local fighting power.

As we consoled each other, the catwoman receptionist finally noticed Teto.

"And who is this?"

"Ah. Didn't I tell you before that I was in a party with someone else? This is her. She'd been staying at home on standby for, uh, reasons."

"I'm Teto! Lady Witch and I are in a party together!" said Teto, handing the receptionist her guild card and shocking the woman like I had the first time I met her.

"You're B-rank too, Teto?! And twenty-two..."

Teto, with her huge bust and beautiful baby face, had been sixteen officially when we'd had her guild card made, so this year she was twenty-two. Her physical age and actual age didn't match up, since she was a golem girl and all, but I decided not to mention that and make things worse.

"Chise... Do you happen to have a youth spell or something to keep yourselves young?"

"Nah, we just have big mana pools," I replied, mentally adding that I'd grown my mana pool too big and lost my ability to age, and that Teto wasn't human so we didn't know how long she'd live.

"Hahhh... I'm so jealous. Beastmen have pretty small mana pools, regardless of type, so it's really rare for any of us to lengthen our life spans like that," complained the receptionist.

Apparently the average beastman had the same amount of mana

as the average human at around 50 to 100 MP, but rarely went much higher than that. On the other hand, the rare few that *did* could use the race-specific Beastchange skill along with Body Strengthening.

“But that’s good, isn’t it? And anyway, what all happened with my potions and herbs?”

“Yes, we’ll be buying them today as well. Would this be all right for payment?”

Looking at what she handed me, I nodded. It was a bit high compared to what they’d run for in Ischea, but that was the regional price.

About seventy percent of Gald’s population were beastmen. Potions for small injuries weren’t really in demand, since their natural healing factor was so strong, but they needed better potions to heal the wounds that they couldn’t just tough out. It wasn’t the friendliest place to amateur mixologists hoping to make a living. This also meant that it took some real doing to find a decent potion in the region. Thanks to that, my high-quality potions were in demand and sold at a premium.

The same couldn’t be said for any mana potion I’d hope to brew; a bunch of folks without much mana to speak of didn’t have much use for them.

After hearing a bit from the receptionist and checking the quest board for collection quests, it was about the right time to go pick up Selene. Once we picked her up, we all got on the flying carpet and headed back to the Wasteland of Nothingness.

Chapter 10: Managing the Wasteland of Nothingness and Reporting to Liriel

Winter had come to the Wasteland of Nothingness. Since it was harder to get to Gald in winter with the snow piling up and intense blizzards rolling in, we were taking the season off.

“When spring comes, I’m gonna trade with Kyal and Touli!” said Selene as she embroidered a white handkerchief.

We spent our time indoors, watching over Selene, reading with her, studying with her, and sometimes cooking with her. Then, in my spare moments, I hopped on my broom and went around the Wasteland, checking out each mana hot spot.

The mana density in the Wasteland of Nothingness was still low. In the unlikely event that the barrier device got damaged, all of the mana inside the barrier would escape, and the plants inside would die, unable to sustain themselves. That was why I was going to each spot to check out the barrier devices, the World Trees, and the trees around them, but—

“I didn’t really expect this...”

I was a bit baffled by what I was seeing.

“The World Tree grew through the barrier, huh?”

Gathering mana in my eyes to use Mana Perception, I could see that one of the World Tree saplings had pierced through the small dome-shaped barrier. Moreover, since World Trees were able to grow in even low-mana environments, the parts poking outside of the barrier were still healthy and green, letting mana out. Though I’d had the barrier devices set to grow along with the World Trees, this barrier hadn’t managed to keep up, and the tree’s branches were growing poked out. The bits that were outside of the barrier were releasing the tree’s mana directly into the Wasteland of Nothingness.

“It’s a surprise, but it’s fine. All I need to do is pour more mana in and make the barrier bigger,” I decided, putting some more mana into the barrier pillars to increase the size of the barrier. “Now the barrier and the World Tree have equaled out. But I’ll have to come check on this spot again. Probably gotta adjust things in the other spots too...”

While I was at it, I used magic to clear away some of the snow to check the soil and saw that some of the vegetation that had been growing had withered and rotted, making a new, very thin layer of soil. It made me realize that I’d started a great cycle.

“If it’s working out like this, I might plant more World Trees in a few other areas come spring. Oh yeah—I should sprinkle these while I’m at it.”

I planted a bunch of medicinal herb seeds that I’d made with Creation Magic on the spot I’d cleared the snow from, covering them with a little bit of soil afterwards.

“Medicinal herbs grow in places with lots of mana, so this might be good. I can’t wait for spring.”

Though the barriers released surplus mana after a set density was reached, there was still more than enough mana to grow herbs. I reckoned that the herb growth would exhale about the same amount of mana as a normal patch of trees.

I adjusted things in each mana hot spot before hopping back on my broom to head home, where Teto and Selene were waiting for me with stew.

“Mama, welcome home! We warmed up some stew!”

“Let’s have a bath and all sleep together!”

“Hee hee, okay. Let’s warm each other up today.”

On that peaceful winter day when my family welcomed me home, I fell asleep like usual.

“It’s been a while, Chise.”

“Liriel. How’s the Wasteland of Nothingness looking from a god’s perspective?”

It had been four—no, *five* years since we last spoke. I’d been raising Selene while putting the knowledge Liriel gave to me to use, working on regenerating the Wasteland.

“Yes, you’ve done a wonderful job for only having worked on it for five years. It feels like a dream, seeing green here and there.”

“I see. That’s good.”

“But I was truly shocked that you’d make World Trees with Creation Magic. We had those trees back in the Original World.”

“The Original World?”

“Yes. They were plants made by the Creator. There’s only one left on this continent, in an elf settlement. They’re quite valuable. I don’t even know how many are left in the world.”

And here I was, growing tons of them. Of course she’d be surprised. But I had thought I’d made a new species of tree, so I had no idea it might have existed in the past. I wasn’t sure whether it was just a matter of humans and gods being equally unoriginal thinkers, or if my Creation Magic had understood what I was going for and chose that plant to pop out...

Other than that, she praised my idea to make sub-barriers within the great barrier the gods had raised and start the regeneration on a small scale; it was, in her words, a very human approach.

“It’s difficult for gods to do much detail work down on the surface, so it’s amazing that you were able to get any regeneration started, even on a small scale. And thanks to the mana you’ve been releasing, the Wasteland of Nothingness will regenerate completely in around one thousand years, even if you leave it as it is now.”

“That’s quite a long time.”

“It’s a massive step up from how long it would have taken without you. I thought it would take ten thousand years at the very least.”

It didn’t quite feel real when she said it would have taken ten thousand years, but I did realize that the regeneration was going quite a bit faster now, even if I just left nature to itself. But I still planned to sustain my efforts.

“Well, I’ll keep on planting more World Trees, and continue producing mana.”

“Yes, please do. But be careful. When the land is restored, you can be sure that human greed will spur your kin to war over its bounty. Every World Tree you’ve planted could be lost with a single errant ember!”

Oh yeah, I had forgotten all about human wars. If I was going to keep this up, eventually Liriel wouldn’t have any reason to keep the great barrier that cut it off from the rest of the world. Then anyone could come inside.

“That’s why I’m going to have you take effective control over the Wasteland of Nothingness!”

Her saying that was a bit troubling. “I’ll have to figure out a way to get the leaders of all the countries surrounding it to agree to a nonaggression pact then.”

“Chise, I love how easily you said that.” Liriel looked very happy, but it didn’t feel much like a compliment. “Knowing you, you’ll force an agreement by solving a monster disaster alone, or helping out some royals or nobles. Do your best!”

“You’re kind of just shoving it all on me, huh? Whatever. I’ll aim for all that when I get the chance.”

And so, my report on the Wasteland of Nothingness and our future plans were set. Once all of the serious talk was done, Liriel’s mood softened.

“So? How is life with a child going?” she asked with a smile that said she meant to get personal.



I answered. “It’s fun. Or—what’s a better way to put it?—every day is just more surprises?”

Living in the Wasteland of Nothingness, just the three of us, had me surprised at bear golems and working to create flying brooms and carpets to keep Selene’s dreams intact.

Once Selene started going to nursery school, she learned a lot, both from interacting with friends and from the teachers, and she told Teto and me everything. Her smug look as she did was so incredibly adorable.

Since we couldn’t go to town during the winter, we had fun spending our time reading her books and teaching her basic life skills (with a little embroidery on the side).

“Your child is just too cute for words, you mean.”

“Yes, of course. She’s my pride and joy, after all.”

When I answered like that, Liriel shot back, murmuring that I was a doting parent with a little bit of a suppressed giggle before ending our dream rendezvous.

Though I didn’t run out of mana—I’d come a long way since last time—I’d spent nearly half of my total pool in my sleep. Looking to my side, I was able to see Teto and Selene dozing happily beside me, and that view lulled me back into unconsciousness.

Chapter 11: Chise (24), Teto (28), Selene (10)

Before I knew it, we'd spent ten years living in the Wasteland of Nothingness.

Selene's physical age was catching up to us. If a stranger looked at us, they might think we were sisters with different hair colors, or just friends. I dreaded the day when she'd get bigger than me and people would think I was the younger one.

"Mom! Teach me magic!"

Lately she'd started calling me mom rather than mama and asking me to mentor her. I wasn't sure if it was influenced by her friends or a budding feeling of independence.

"Magic, huh? Sure, I guess."

Her mana pool had grown along with her, and she had about 3,000 MP by age five.

I wasn't terribly thrilled by the idea of teaching her magic. Your aging slowed when your mana pool grew and you got more efficient at moving mana around your body, and I didn't want her to stop aging young like I did. Which I explained to her, but—

"Really?! Then I could stay with mom and Teto!"

Oh no, our angel is so cute!

Thus, her magic training started, but the magic I used myself was mostly through feel and forcing things with pure mana. When I asked the goddess Liriel to teach me about magic during a dream oracle—

"I will teach you Body Hardening, the superior version of Body Strengthening. To describe it simply, it raises the density of the mana surrounding your body."

Apparently, Body Hardening was handy for blocking attacks that could get through Strengthening. Way back when, Teto had been slashed in half by the A-rank monster, Death-Scythe Mantis. The swell of mana towards its scythes was the sign it was using Body Hardening, which broke through Teto's Body Strengthening. The skill was also apparently the one thing that separated a B-rank adventurer from an A-rank one, so Teto and I learned it to keep our dignity as Selene's older sister and mother.

Other than that—

"Your use of magic is very crude. Be more aware of the components of magical rituals."

Those components were strengthening, transformation, release, control, materialization, etcetera, etcetera. For example, with the water spell *Aqua Bullet*, you would *materialize* the water, *strengthen* the shape, and then *release* the spell. You could also *control* it to seek the target, raising the grade.

By breaking down the magic I was using now into these components and putting them back together again, I was able to increase the damage they did. I was starting to grasp the gulf between mages who had proper training versus homegrown mages.

It wasn't long before we saw the results of my passing along what Liriel taught me to Selene.

"Haaah!"

"Good hit!"

Selene was punching using Body Hardening, while Teto took the hits and praised her. She couldn't use it for very long, but judging from her physical strength as she did, she could probably punch out an orc without complaint.

Other than that, she took to the spell *Water Cutter* remarkably well; it always seemed to cut cleaner and deeper for her. Since there was a lot of untouched land in the Wasteland of Nothingness, she could practice all she liked, and in turn she'd be dispersing her mana into her surroundings. Also, by fighting in a low-mana environment, she was able to gain resistances to mana absorption and mana sealing.

Taking my eyes off of her and Teto as they went wild sparring, I looked up into the sky.

Dear Selene's birth mother, whose name I still don't know: I've taught your daughter a bit too much, and now she's too strong.

Oh well. Despite her strength, she didn't do anything violent with it—not that I would let her in the first place. I just told myself it was only for self-defense. Aside from teaching her magic, she picked up a hankering for strange fruit when she saw me eating them, so I let her have some for a while. Thanks to that, her mana pool was well over 20,000 MP, putting her at full-fledged court magician-level.

"Selene, Teto. Let's stop it around there."

"Okaaay!"

Teto still had mock battles in town against other adventurers. By fighting other races like beastmen, elves, dwarves, and dragonmen, she'd learned a breadth of styles and passed them on to Selene.

Teto's scary, going from learner to master so quickly.

Her mana pool hadn't grown much lately, since she hadn't had all that many opportunities to get magic stones, but she'd grown a lot stronger.

"It's really hot today, huh?! Oh, we should go play in the water at the spring!"

“That’s a great idea! We can catch some fish for dinner too!”

After ten years of regeneration, water had begun to collect aboveground here and there. By maintaining those spots, I was able to cultivate springs and rivers, and connect them to bodies of water outside the Wasteland’s barrier. They were great for cooling off on hot days or after sparring, and fish from outside had come upstream and multiplied.

“Oh! Then you should teach me how to swim, Teto!”

“Got it! I’ll teach you.”

“You two, leave the swimming to another day. We’re going into town today to help out at the guild, aren’t we? Also, if you’re playing in the water, make sure you remember to change your clothes afterwards.”

“Okaaaay.”

I watched the two of them head to the spring, thinking of how I spent my time looking forward to the changes that both Selene and the Wasteland itself would go through.

Once they were back from playing in the water and had gotten their appearances in order, we all got on the flying carpet and headed into town.

In the past, we used to leave Selene at nursery school, but now that she was bigger, she came to the guild with us once a week to work as a trainee guild employee and healer. When we cheerfully walked into the guildhall, I noticed the vibes inside were different than usual.

“Chise, Teto, Selene! Great timing!”

“What’s the panic?”

There had been some changes in receptionists over the last five years, but the same catwoman was still there, even after she got married.

“A dungeon has appeared in the next region over!”

“Okay. What’s the problem with that?”

“The problem?! It popped up right in the middle of Gald’s breadbasket! A ton of the monsters inside breathe fire, so on the off chance a stampede occurs, they might burn all the grain and plunge the country into a massive famine!”

When they were harder to manage and more trouble than help, dungeons needed to be destroyed by taking their core.

“What’s the dungeon’s rank?”

“Somewhere over B-rank. There are C-rank adventurers standing guard outside of the entrance in case any monsters slip out.”

It was nearing autumn harvest time. Even if the dungeon wasn’t destroyed soon, just holding out until everything was harvested would buy some time. If that was everyone’s line of reasoning, I could

understand.

“We’d be in a bind if food prices went up too. But Selene...”

“I want to help you, mom! I don’t want to just wait around!”

After the small-scale stampede incident, we sometimes got asked to take B-rank quests. There were only maybe one or two a month; when the usual adventurers who were strong enough to take them were out of commission because of injuries or gear repairs, Teto and I took over. When we did, Selene would stay overnight at the nursery school. But we had no idea how long this quest would take; capturing a dungeon was a whole other ball game.

“...Fine. But you aren’t doing any dungeon diving, only helping the local adventurers’ guild. Can I ask for a reference letter for her?”

“Understood! Heaven knows there’s no shortage of fighters coming out of there with burn wounds; a healer would be a great help!”

And so we headed straight for the dungeon. While most adventurers would have to take a wagon to get there, our flying carpet cut the travel time by an order of magnitude. We landed once to camp overnight and arrived at our destination before noon the next day.

Chapter 12: Little Selene the Healer's Great Efforts

The harvest region the dungeon had appeared in was covered in swaying golden wheat. In the very middle of it was a huge, reddish-black mound of boulders, with the wheat fields surrounding it completely slashed down. Adventurers stood guard nearby to make sure no monsters left the dungeon, while a simple field hospital had been erected near the entrance to heal the adventurers who'd been injured.

When we flew down, all the adventurers around went on the defensive.

"We're B-rank adventurers from the guild a region over, sent to help capture the dungeon!"

I laced my voice with mana as I spoke, and though they were skeptical of our appearances, they checked over the guild cards we pulled out and the recommendation letter for Selene.

"Reinforcements! Head to the guild sub-branch. They'll tell you all about everything."

"Got it."

I took Teto and Selene along. When we got there, a beastman who seemed to be the guildmaster was taking command, but—

"Hah? What're these brats doing he—?"

"Who are you calling brats? Actually look at us before you open your mouth!"

"Bwah?!"

During our travels around Ischea, we'd gotten no end of flak for our appearances at most of the guilds where we'd stopped over. It was a pain in the ass to deal with every single time, and so I fell back on tried-and-true peace through superior mana.

"I'm Chise the Witch, sent by the border town of Vil's adventurers' guild to help capture the dungeon. Here's my guild card."

"Teto is a swordswoman! Here!"

"O-Okay... Sorry about that. Wai— *Twenty-four?!'*"

I'd stopped aging outwardly at twelve, so he was shocked that I was officially twice that. But once the bearman got his bearings back, he introduced himself.

"I'm Navea, the guildmaster from the nearby town of Ganahd. And this is...?"

Navea and the other adventurers who'd come to help all looked at Selene, so I explained.

"I couldn't leave my daughter back in town alone, so I brought her. This is her recommendation from our guild."

"Huh? You brought a kid? *Here?* Wait..."

The recommendation letter from Vil explained the Selene situation. Though she was only ten, she was a damn good healer, thanks to all the direct mentoring from a B-rank adventurer like me. The letter wrote about how there'd been a fire in Vil, and that she'd healed full-body burn victims and did the same work as a dedicated guild healer from her position as trainee guild employee. The contents had the guildmaster looking back and forth between the letter and the nervous Selene.

"You're scaring my daughter, looking at her like that."

"Ah... I was just a bit shocked... Is this serious?"

"You've already got injured adventurers, don't you? You'll understand once you see her at work. Selene."

"I'm okay! I can do it!"

When I was teaching Selene magic, I'd had her read books on human anatomy, and brought home the corpses of humanoid monsters to dissect. Though I felt like I might've been too hard on her, she was used to blood and monster entrails enough now to dismantle a small monster on her own while helping at the guild.

"You can treat Selene like a trainee, but I want you to put her up in a safe inn and have her guarded by female adventurers. If any problems come up—"

When I let out my mana again, the guildmaster just nodded like a bobblehead toy.

We all headed right to the field hospital to check out the injured.

"Selene, do it all just like I taught you."

"Okay, mom!"

Just as I'd instructed, she headed for the most injured person there. More than half of their body was covered with burns, and their leather armor had melted and stuck to their skin. Their respiratory tract must have been burned raw as well, because their breathing was rough. Their hair was all burnt, and their nose had been carbonized and fallen off. They were surrounded by several other sobbing adventurers who'd clearly given up on them.

"*Search, Hi-Heal!*"

Reaching out her hands, Selene cast her magic. The unsuspected spell *Search* swept over all of the patient's injuries, letting her find precisely what to target with her healing spell. The healing spell grew new skin, regrew their nose, and even restored the spots on their scalp that probably wouldn't have grown hair ever again.

“Amazing... We thought that adventurer was done for...” murmured the guildmaster as the injured person in question started breathing normally, having had their burnt respiratory tract healed too.

“U-Urgh... I...”

“Big sis?!”

It seemed that the patient had been a catwoman adventurer. As she sat up, the leather armor that had fused to her skin fell off with that old skin and sebaceous matter, revealing her beautiful chest.

“Awawah! Sis! Your boobs!”

“Wha— Wai— What?!”

“Okay, okay. Don’t go flashing my kid,” I said, pulling a big cape out of my magic bag before draping it over the woman. “Selene, how’s your mana?”

“Hmm... That took about ten percent,” she replied.

“Then don’t overdo things. If you get too low, make sure to drink a mana potion.”

“Yeah, I will. I’ve got some.”

“And you’re still a kid, so don’t overwork yourself. Make sure to eat and get in your eight hours.”

“You’re worrying too much, mom.”

“And—” I started.

“Prioritize the people near death. You can leave the ones who won’t kick the bucket for another day,” she recited, cutting me off.

“Right.”

We carried on, ignoring everyone staring stunned at our back-and-forth.

“Okay then. Teto and I are heading into the dungeon, so work hard.”

“You two do your best too!”

A mother just *had* to work hard if her daughter encouraged her like that.

“Well then, guildmaster. I hope I can count on you to make sure my daughter doesn’t overextend herself.”

“Yep!”

After bowing deeply to the guildmaster and asking him to take care of Selene, Teto and I headed towards the dungeon’s entrance.

Selene’s Side

“Mom’s such a worrywart,” I said with a sigh as the old guy mom called “guildmaster” walked over to me.

“Seriously, who the hell are you guys?”

“Mom is a proper witch! And I’m a girl aiming to be a proper

witch someday too!"

"Witch? Ahh, you mean a woman who uses magic. Why not just call yourselves mages?"

He didn't seem to quite get it, but I called mom a witch because she called herself that, and because I wanted to be just like her. She didn't actually mean anything special when she called herself one. All of the witches in my storybooks were mages dressed like mom, so that must be a proper witch's uniform.

"Anyway, Mr. Guildmaster. Who're you gonna have guard me like my mom asked?"

"Oh yeah, that. Hey, you guys!" he yelled, calling out for the lady adventurer I'd just healed and her friends. "Guard your little savior healer here! You'll do it, right?"

"You're asking us, when all of our armor's been burnt up?"

Apparently the lady I helped was part of a C-rank catwoman adventurer party called the Leopardesses of the Mountains and Rivers.

"We'll provide the equipment. She's a skilled little healer, and her mom's a high-ranking adventurer from a ways away. We got a recommendation letter for her from their guild, so I want you to take care of her."

"Got it. A little girl like her is a magnet for creeps, so we'll keep her good and safe!"

There was a chance that confused adventurers might lash out at me while I was busy healing, so it'd be easier to work with them there to hold them back. If I was alone, I'd have to make them sleep either physically or magically, or else I couldn't do any healing.

And so, the Leopardesses kept me safe as I healed the adventurers who were carried in. As the other healers fixed up the adventurers, I focused more on the heavily injured ones.

One of those heavily injured adventurers was surrounded by his party, just like the leader of the Leopardesses had been. He was a beastman with his ears ripped off, his eyes crushed by monster claws, and his innards hanging out of his stomach as he bled out. He'd been ignored by the other healers because they thought he couldn't be saved.

"What? Whaddya want?!" his party members yelled at me as I approached.

"I'm here to heal him, so move."

"You say that, but you're just gonna scam us out of more money! Or are you gonna get our hopes up before you say you aren't gonna heal a disgusting beastman!"

The Leopardesses panicked a bit as the party yelled at me.

"This girl wouldn't do that! Sorry about them. They all moved here from another country."

“It’s okay. It happens a lot.”

Back in Vil, there were about the same number of humans as beastmen, but these people had apparently come from somewhere mostly populated by humans. And since beastmen didn’t have much mana, there weren’t many healers among them. They’d apparently had to ask other races for healing, and those people had been prejudiced against beastmen. It was no wonder they were on guard against me.

“St...op it... Don’t yell at...a little kid...”

“Bro!”

I got closer to the beastman adventurer, who was still conscious, and knelt down beside him. “You’re not disgusting. Beastmen are all wonderful. *Hi-Heal!*” I said, holding his cold, bloody hand as I worked to fix his big wounds. I really wanted to heal his ripped ears and his smooshed eyes too, but I only had so much mana. As long as he lived, we could just do that later.

“He should survive now. I’m gonna go heal some other people, okay?”

“Huh? Ah...”

The adventurers were stunned, but I kept my stride, healing everyone who’d been on the brink of death. Before I knew it, evening had come.

“Selene, it’ll be time to rest soon.”

“Ah, you’re right.”

“We’ve got an inn and food prepared, so you should sleep for today.”

“Thank you for taking care of me.”

I finally noticed that there were fewer adventurers lying in the medical building. Leaving the rest to the other healers, I went to cool off and recover.

There hadn’t been any casualties among the people I’d healed today. But some people had crushed eyes, ripped ears, or lost limbs, so mom or I could use some regenerative magic on things like that later.

So, mom, come back soon.

Chapter 13: Clearing the Sweltering Dungeon (Part 1)

“If we clear this dungeon, we can curry favor with the country of Gald.”

“And then we’ll make them acknowledge you as the owner of the Wasteland of Nothingness! That’s just like you, Lady Witch. Also...”

“What, Teto?”

“What are you gonna do with the dungeon core?” she asked, eyes full of hope.

“Nope. I gave you the last one, so this one is mine.”

“That sucks.”

The place where Teto and I were chatting was ten floors down in the dungeon. Our objective this time was clearing the dungeon before anyone else.

The cavernous dungeon was full of fire-breathers, but not a single one was able to get through my barrier or Teto’s Body Hardening. Teto used the earth spell *Earth Sonar* to check out the structure of the caves, and we were taking the shortest route we could to go deeper. I let Teto have all of the monsters’ magic stones, so she was chowing down and strengthening herself for the first time in a long while.

In these past ten years, we hadn’t had a chance to run dungeons, but we weren’t out of practice. And I had a larger mana pool this time at 100,000, letting me force my way through most every obstacle. Before I knew it, we’d hit the safe zone on the sixteenth floor and registered with the magic circle.

“Lady Witch~, apparently this is the spot most other people’ve gotten to.”

“Yeah. It’s pretty late though; let’s rest here for today.”

When I checked the time on my pocket watch, it was already evening. We needed to get our bedding ready and get something to eat.

“Shouldn’t we pop back to the surface once? Aren’t you worried about Selene?”

“She’s got a decent amount of money on her, and self-defense magic tools. This is a rehearsal for when she’s out on her own.”

Girls usually started working as early as age twelve, and sometimes were married with a family between fourteen and eighteen. Rather than be overprotective and think that it was all too soon for

Selene at ten, I needed to start planning around the possibility that she'd be going off on her own sooner rather than later.

"We've taught her how to deal with anyone who might attack her. It'll be fine. Absolutely fine."

"You're leaking mana as you say that, Lady Witch."

Hee hee hee, just the thought of our angel Selene living on her own is making me so lonely that I might go crazy. When she gets married, I'm not gonna accept anyone who doesn't have a hopeful future and can make her happy! Never ever! I howled to myself internally.

Teto gave me a troubled smile before hugging me from behind.

"Teto gets to monopolize Lady Witch for tonight, then~!"

"Heh heh, yeah. It's been a while since we were last alone like this."

After spending the night inside the dungeon like that, we resumed our dungeon run. I'd considered popping back once to check the current run status, but I felt like it'd be a waste of our time, so we kept going deeper.

Once we'd passed the nineteenth floor, we stumbled into something unexpected.

"...Lady Witch? Someone's here."

"I wonder if it's some of the adventurers ahead of us. How are they?"

The deeper we went in the dungeon, the higher the temperature and humidity inside the cave grew, and the area around us was already over forty degrees Celsius. The environment was just as rough as the fire-using monsters, but I was relying on the barrier magic I normally used to control and regulate things in the Wasteland of Nothingness to keep the temperature around us at a certain level.

"They're alive, but their movements are dulled."

"Hmm... It'll put us off the route to the next floor down, but let's go check on them."

We went after them just in case, only to find the other adventurers collapsed on the floor, breathing heavily. They all had heatstroke and had run out of water.

"W-Water..."

"Yeah, yeah. I've got all the water you could want."

I used magic to lower the temperature around us and handed all of them canteens full of water. They downed the water immediately, so I made them eat some salty candy to get back the minerals they'd sweat out.

"You've saved us. But why are there humans here? Kids, at that?"

"I'm actually over twenty, you know."

"Seriously?!"

Once we got through the regular exchange, we all introduced

ourselves.

“We’re the B-rank party, Dragon’s Chin. We’re the top adventurers in the area.”

“I’m Chise, B-rank. This is my partner Teto, also B-rank. We came to get rid of the dungeon, since there’s a chance it could light the whole region on fire.”

I asked them why they’d collapsed.

“We’re in here for the exact same reason, but this place is *rough*, especially the temperature and humidity.”

“After we beat the fifteenth floor’s gatekeeper, we figured we’d keep going on through, but the environment changed so suddenly after the sixteenth floor that our bodies couldn’t keep up... We tried to push through and clear the dungeon, but the heat nearly killed us.”

While it was important to get the dungeon destroyed ASAP, I also thought it was probably bad to throw caution to the wind.

“You probably should’ve retreated once to prepare some countermeasures.”

“Yeah, we’re ashamed.”

No matter how high-ranked the adventurer, or how strong they were against monsters, humans would die if they couldn’t deal with their environment.

“So? What’s your plan now?” I asked the adventurers who had collapsed, only for them to give me a confused look. “Do you think you can get back to the safe zone alone? Or do you want us to escort you there?”

“Uh... Escort us, please. We’re still not at our best.”

It probably wasn’t an easy call to make for a bunch of B-ranks, but it was a sound one given the risks of trying to put up with the heat on their own.

“How much d’you want as pay?”

“...Ah, yeah. Pay.”

I’d forgotten to ask for a reward for saving them. From their perspective, we’d given them our valuable water (actually very easy to get with my Creation Magic) and were going to escort them out. If they died, it’d be a complete waste of all of the magic stones and materials they’d gotten from monsters, or the treasure they’d found while exploring the dungeon. Plus, since the dungeon was so new, it still had tons of treasure, and it seemed like they’d found a few chests on their way this deep.

“Hmm... How about you give us half of the magic stones you’ve gotten from monsters up until now.”

“That’s all you want? Really?”

They’d been ahead of us and looted a lot of treasure. They probably wouldn’t have been able to complain if we’d demanded half

of all that, but I was offering them a bargain.

“It’s fine. We can use the stones for things, and we aren’t interested in jewelry.”

They pulled half of the magic stones they’d got from the dungeon monsters they’d slain up until then from their magic bag and gave them to me. Half was more than everything we’d collected, since we’d been taking the shortest path, and they’d been in the dungeon longer.

“Okay. We’ve reached a deal.”

After Teto took the stones and put them in her magic bag, we took the adventurers back the way we’d come. When we brought them to the safe zone on the sixteenth floor, they just kept thanking us, so we couldn’t help but ask for a little extra.

“Make sure to tell other adventurers how important preparing ahead is. Also, my daughter is up there, so can you give her my love for me?”

Once I’d given them the message to pass on, we headed even deeper, without going back to the surface. The cave environment ended on the twentieth floor; everything past the twentieth floor was an open field.

“I did not expect this.”

The dungeon floors were now a desert, a fake sun pounding down to bring the temperature above fifty degrees Celsius.

For the moment, we registered at the magic circle in the safe zone’s oasis and camped.

The extreme difference between daytime and nighttime temperatures in the desert would be horrifying for most adventurers, zapping them both physically and mentally, but it just made us nostalgic. Remembering how we’d felt a similar cold at night ten years ago in the Wasteland of Nothingness, Teto and I drank some hot milk and looked up into the dungeon’s starry sky.

Chapter 14: Clearing the Sweltering Dungeon (Part 2)

Selene's Side

One week had passed since mom and Teto entered the dungeon.

On the third day, I had headed to the field hospital and was busy healing people's wounds again, only to learn that the top adventurers who'd tried the dungeon had returned.

Apparently, the dungeon's environment changed drastically between the fifteenth and sixteenth floors, so it would be incredibly difficult to stay inside for long periods of time without taking countermeasures. The adventuring party had been going on pure willpower and ended up collapsing from dehydration. But then mom and Teto appeared and saved them, allowing them to get back to the surface alive. They thanked me while I was checking them over for little stuff.

Mom should've come back with them, I thought to myself. But she had special magic that would let her produce things from out of nowhere. She'd be able to use that to get whatever they needed to replenish from inside the dungeon, so there was no need for them to stop their dungeon run and come back up.

Today, as I believed in mom and Teto and waited, more injured people were brought in. Little by little, info about how things worked inside the dungeon was spreading, and fewer people were getting seriously injured because they were able to take measures against things. That, and other adventurers had started focusing on safety and given up on trying to capture the dungeon, instead thinning out the number of monsters inside so they wouldn't overflow out to the surface.

Today passed like that again, and two weeks and a couple days after mom and Teto had first gone down into the dungeon, it vanished, and the two of them came back.

Witch's Side

To be frank, the dungeon floors past the twentieth were a pain in the ass. Specifically, the stairs to the next floor were hidden somewhere in the vast desert, buried in the sand.

“Lady Witch. Teto’s searching for ground, but something is getting in my way!”

What was worse is that when Teto tried to ferret them out, monsters that moved through the sand would jam her sonar with their own vibrations, making the search even harder. We ended up being forced to search for the monsters emitting the sound waves one by one to defeat them. While this let us find a bunch of treasure boxes buried in the sand and loot some pretty rare magic tools, this kept going on for ten whole floors. We ended up only being able to get through one floor a day.

The gatekeeper on the thirtieth floor ended up being just as much of a pain in the ass as all of that too.

The Longworm (better name pending) was a presumably A-rank monster that could move incredibly fast through the sand, and would divide wherever it took a hit. Which meant that if you attacked without thinking it through, it would divide. Then, when you ended up getting flustered and attacking more to try to just get it killed, you’d just end up with more, shorter worms.

Having countless tiny worms jumping out at you from the sand was irritating enough, and then they had to start acting like turrets and shooting mud balls at you when you fled into the air. And they ran when you chased them.

“Oh, for—! Teto! Let’s just reset this!”

“Roger!”

So, we backtracked to the twenty-ninth floor and then came back, this time annihilating each piece so it couldn’t divide.

When we made it to the thirty-first floor, we picked the dungeon core up off of the pedestal, and that was it. Once we’d done that, the dungeon started forcefully teleporting all of the adventurers inside back to the surface, starting from the lowest floors and gradually getting to us in the depths.

Once we were back outside, I’d turned my head to make sure the pile of boulders from the dungeon was gone, only to hear someone calling for us.

“Mom! Teto!”

“We’re back, Selene.”

Selene was rushing towards us, dragging the adventurers who’d been acting as her guards behind her, so I hugged her head-on.



All of the pain-in-the-ass gimmicks that had delayed us had hardened my heart, only for it to be mended all at once by my daughter's hug.

"We're home!"

"That kinda hurts~!"

Teto joined in on the hug, squeezing the both of us tight while Selene protested in amusement.

We'd never been apart for two whole weeks before, and we'd respected Selene's wishes and left healing the adventurers to her, but she seemed like she'd grown two whole times bigger.

"Mom?"

"Good work, Selene. Have things been okay while we were gone?"

"Nothing happened to me. And you two had it harder, didn't you?"

I nearly teared up at how quickly she'd grown to be able to force a smile and worry about *us*.

"Once we finish here, let's have a nice rest at home," I said, finishing up the family talk before turning to speak to the women who'd looked after Selene. "Thank you for guarding my daughter. Were there any problems?"

"Um... Er... If I could just get your ear for a second..." they said, whispering a few things best summarized in bullet points into my ear—namely:

Some of the adventurers she healed had tried to recruit her into their parties after seeing her healing skills.

One adventurer (wolfman, age twenty-seven, single) had become infatuated with her after getting healed, and had proposed.

Some delinquent adventurers had tried to kidnap her for her skills, and she fought them off herself.

A personal guard had formed, the core of which was made up of people Selene had saved. (Basically, it was a fan club.)

Her determination to prioritize healing the most injured and not to let anyone die had led people to start calling her "the little saintess."

"...I see. Selene worked hard. Good girl."

"Eheh heh heh, I just did what I could!"

Despite the bright smile on my face as I praised Selene, my anger and annoyance at people making passes at her was making my mana leak out behind me.

"Calm down, Lady Witch. You're scaring everyone."

Selene was used to my mana, so she didn't notice at all and just gave me a confused look. The Leopardesses and all the other adventurers around us, on the other hand, were terrified. Once Teto

pointed it out, I gave Selene a pat on the head to praise her while calming myself down.

While we were having our little mother-daughter moment, the people around us who I'd accidentally overpowered with my mana were all giving us horrified looks that just screamed "what the hell *are* these girls?!"

But then Navea the guildmaster appeared, parting the sea of onlookers.

"Looks like you cleared the dungeon."

"Yes, we finished it. Thank you for looking out for Selene."

"We should be the ones thanking you. I didn't expect such a tiny group of reinforcements to make a surprise victory. To be honest, when I heard that there were more than fifteen floors, I thought it'd be impossible to clear anytime soon."

After that little chat, we followed the flow of adventurers leaving the harvest region and headed to the guild. There, we gave an oral summary of the items we'd found inside and what each floor looked like. When we explained how much of an absolute pain in the ass the desert areas from the twentieth floor on were, Navea gave us a weary look.

"Extreme temperature differences between day and night, searching for the stairs to the next floor when they were buried under blowing mounds of sand, monsters that attacked from both inside the sand and the sky, monsters that blocked your search magic... Seriously. How the *hell* did you clear it?"

"That's a secret."

Since we got the contents of some of the treasure chests that had been buried under all of that pain-in-the-ass sand on those desert floors, the guild didn't have much to complain about.

And so—

"Chise, Teto. With what you've done this time, you're all set to move up to A-rank. Each country holds an exam in their capitals. What do you wanna do?"

Apparently, the adventurers' guilds in each country's capital would gather all of the B-rank adventurers who were qualified to move up in rank and hold exams. The number of times they'd hold them each year was different, based on the structure of each country and the number of qualified adventurers, but it usually came out to two or three times a year.

"I see. Maybe we'll go on a trip and take it after Selene gets married."

"That'll be a long way down the line. D'you have an elf or some other long-livin' race way back in your family, or some small race like a dwarf?"

I just gave the guildmaster a vague smile in response. Since I was a reincarnator, my body had been created by Liriel, so I didn't have any parents or ancestors.

By the way, guild cards didn't expire, no matter how many years an adventurer took off from questing. In this world, there were races like elves, dwarves, and dragonmen who lived long lives and had long heydays. If promising adventurers from long-lived races accidentally let a few decades pass between quests and ended up having to start from the beginning again, it'd be a loss in many ways.

"Well then. Our last order of business is what you're gonna do with the dungeon core."

"Hmm. Would anyone want to buy it?"

"The country would, of course. Gald's royal family wants to buy it for fifty mythril pieces, dungeon clear rewards included."

That'd be about five hundred million yen, converted. Things were cheaper in this world, so that'd be enough for a normal family to live modestly for three whole generations. If we sold the treasure we found inside the dungeon, we could make even more. So—

"We don't need money. Instead, we want something specific from the royal family."

"Huh? You're gonna demand something from the royal family? I gotta ask. What is it you want?"

It sounded like he was thinking I wanted some treasure they had or something, so I answered. "The rights to the Wasteland of Nothingness."

What I wanted from Gald's royal family in exchange for the dungeon core was simply a magic contract:

I would be the owner of the Wasteland of Nothingness. The land would be extraterritorial. It would be independent, not loyal to any country.

That was it.

"What the hell kind of contract is that...?"

"Yeah, you'd think like that, wouldn't you?"

The Wasteland was a spot that had been covered in a great barrier by the gods for two thousand years, which no one could enter. It was basically like I was pointing to the moon in the sky and asking for a contract saying I was the owner. Even if I did get ownership of it, I couldn't do anything with it, and it wouldn't have any effect on anything.

But to me, when I could come and go from the Wasteland as I pleased, and I had already lived there ten years, it had a different meaning.

"I have no idea what you're aiming for, but I'll mention your request. No guarantee they'll bite, though."

“If they don’t, we’ll just have to bring this dungeon core somewhere else.”

“Wait, wait, wait just a sec! That’d be a problem! Fine, I’ll work hard to get them to take you up on your contract!”

The guildmaster was cradling his head in his hands, but since having a middle-aged man point the top of his head at me didn’t do anything for me, I quickly ended things there.

“Well then, I’ll leave the negotiations to you. We’ve got Selene, so after we sell the drops we got and get her payment for all that healing, we’ll be heading home.”

“Home? To the town of Vil, right?”

“Yep. More specifically, a forest near there. Close to the Wasteland of Nothingness too. I’m worried about the fields, so we’ll be leaving.”

“Got it. Once negotiations are done with, I’ll ask the guild there to pass the message on and send someone. So don’t go selling that dungeon core to someone else, okay?” the guildmaster said, heaving a deep sigh as he saw us off.

We then went to sell off the non-magic stone drops and all of the treasure we found in the dungeon, aside from a few handy magic ones. We also picked up Selene’s payment for healing. She was supposed to get one silver per person, but she’d healed the adventurers the other healers had given up on and used her spare mana to regenerate some of their lost appendages. I had expected to need to heal everyone else once I got back, but I’d been shocked to find that she’d done her job perfectly. In the end, she was paid ten large gold for the healing, and the adventurers’ guild was able to avoid losing any working adventurers.

“Okay. Let’s put your pay on your guild card.”

“Okay!”

Selene had a guild card to use as identification. Though she was treated as an unranked trainee guild employee, she could store money on it.

Glad that Selene had a proper head for money and wouldn’t go wasting it all even though she got a big payday, we all hopped on the flying carpet and headed back to Vil.

Chapter 15: Selene's Eleventh Birthday Party

After clearing the dungeon and reporting it to our home guild, the three of us headed back home to the Wasteland of Nothingness and kicked back.

We'd been gone for two weeks, but there hadn't been any changes in the Wasteland, and the bear golems with their mud ball ears had watered and taken care of the fields. Since the golems couldn't eat like Teto, some veggies had grown past the point that they were good for eating.

"Mom, can we eat this?"

"It wouldn't taste any good, so let's just leave it to nourish the fields."

"It feels like a waste..."

We decided to turn the vegetables that had grown too big or dropped on the ground into compost instead of eating them. While it was a bit of a waste, the world would keep turning, and they'd end up becoming rich soil.

And so we took a week off while managing the Wasteland of Nothingness. Once it was over, we went to town to turn in some potions and herbs. No word had come to the adventurers' guild from Gald's royal family concerning the dungeon core, so the season for cooping ourselves up arrived at last.

And then, on the first day of winter, I woke up at my usual time.

"Nnn... Morning, huh?"

I slipped out of Teto's arms and got out of bed before putting on my outfit.

"Thanks for helping, guys."

When I headed to the kitchen to make breakfast, I heard Selene's voice from outside. Stepping out of the house towards where I'd heard it, I saw Selene's back, along with the bear golems.

"Good morning, Selene. You're up early."

"Ah, mom. Morning. I felt kind of restless, so I figured the golems and I could handle laundry, since you're probably still tired from the dungeon," she replied, smiling a little bashfully.

In front of Selene and the golems was a wooden tub and some laundry soap extracted from soap herbs, along with yesterday's laundry and her stuffed dog, Harry. The tub was filled with warm

water, and the laundry soap was already mixed in and ready for washing.

Selene was giving me a smile that just begged for praise, while the bear golems stood behind her with their chests puffed out proudly. I just had to smile.

"I see. Then I guess I'll just leave the laundry to you while I get breakfast ready."

"Yep! Leave it to me! *Wash!*"

Brimming with confidence, she lifted the warm water from the tub and formed it into a ball of water in the air. Then, she made a vortex inside the ball as the bear golems started tossing laundry inside, along with Harry the stuffed dog. Though Selene had tried and failed to copy my laundry method many times, I was now fine with leaving it all to her.

"Well then, I guess I'll make some French toast for breakfast this morning, with lots of that maple syrup you love."

"French toast?! That sweet, fluffy, syrupy...! Wah, that was close!"

When I told her that I was making her favorite, her glee overrode her control over the spell. She rushed to get it back, managing to do it right before the ball of water collapsed. It was kind of funny seeing the golems freak out and back away so they wouldn't get wet.

Since it'd be mean for me to stick around and distract Selene, I headed back to the kitchen to make our meal. As I cooked the French toast, Teto woke up, lured by the smell.

"Good morning, Lady Witch."

"Good morning, Teto. Selene should be back in soon, so can you get the plates and some tea ready?"

"Got it!"

As Teto and I stood in the kitchen getting things ready for breakfast, Selene had finished the laundry and came back inside.

"Uuugh, doing laundry is cold. My fingers are freezing..." she mumbled as she walked in, squeezing at her fingertips. Teto and I greeted her.

"It's winter now, after all. Breakfast is ready, so go wash your hands and gargle."

"We've got warm tea for you too!"

"Thank you, mom, Teto."

After cleaning herself up, Selene held the teacup Teto poured for her in her hands, warming herself up as she drank it and ate her breakfast.

"Hey, mom, what are we gonna do this winter?" she asked as I watched her enjoy her meal.

In the winter, when everything was covered in a thick layer of snow, humans, monsters, and all kinds of living beings stopped

working. Since there were fewer quests at the guild, we usually spent the whole season hunkered down in the Wasteland of Nothingness.

“Hmm? I dunno. But today, at least, we’re going to celebrate your birthday.”

“We need to celebrate you turning eleven!”

We’d been entrusted with baby Selene during the warmer half of spring. We didn’t know what day she’d been born, but calculating backwards through an infant’s developmental stages, I was able to estimate that she was born between autumn and winter. Thus, we had a birthday party for her every autumn, buying her presents from town to celebrate.

“It got a bit delayed thanks to the dungeon situation, but we’ve got to celebrate your birthday.”

“We’ll make yummy food and have fun! We’ve got some special presents for you this year!”

“I wonder what kind of present you guys got for me... Ah, I’ll help get the party ready too!”

Teto and I smiled, getting warm fuzzy feelings in our chests as we watched her. We all worked together to cook for the party and bake her cake.

“Mom, when did you buy these ingredients?” Selene asked as she put her apron on.

“...Back when we were last in town. My magic bag slows time, so they didn’t go bad,” I answered. I didn’t tell her I’d actually sneakily made them with my Creation Magic, but it didn’t seem like she meant anything deep with the question.

And so we kept on cooking; I chided Teto and Selene with a smirk as they “taste-tested” the food. When we just had the cake left to bake

“Okay, next we’ll put the flour in to make the batter.”

“Got it! I’ll get the flour! *Psychokinesis!*”

“Ah, Selene?!”

She used a bit too much power when she grabbed it off a high shelf, smashing the bag and sending flour flying out of the opening. It was about to come down on our heads, so I calmly put up a barrier to stop it from getting on Selene and the ingredients on the counter.

“Mom! I-I’m sorry!”

“It’s fine. Let’s just get this flour cleaned up.”

“Ahh, yeah. We do have to clean it up, but... Mom, you’re covered in flour too.”

“...Hmm?”

When I tilted my head a little in confusion, wondering what she meant, flour came falling off of my head. Though I’d put up a barrier to protect Selene and the birthday cake, I’d completely forgotten to

include myself in the barrier.

“Lady Witch, Selene, what’s wrong? ...Oooh? Lady Witch, your head is white!”

Teto, who’d been out of the kitchen getting things ready for the party, came back to check on us when she heard us fussing.

“Teto, can you do me a favor and ready the bath?”

“Roger! I’ll hop in with you too!”

Taking a break from baking the cake, we cleaned up the flour covering everything before all three of us hopped in the bath to clean it off of ourselves. After that, we restarted our baking efforts and finished up a shortcake.

The birthday party was that night.

“Selene, happy eleventh birthday!”

“Happy birthday!”

“Thank you, mom, Teto!”

The table was covered in Selene’s favorite foods, and the strawberry shortcake had eleven candles on it. Selene blew them all out in one breath, smiling shyly. We calmly ate, and then it was finally time to give her our presents.

“We were actually torn on what to give you, so we’ll let you choose.”

“They’re all magic tools we found in the dungeon! You can have whichever one you want!”

Though we’d sold most of the treasure we’d found during our dungeon run, we’d saved a few of the handiest tools. We figured she could choose the one she wanted herself from the lineup of candidates.

Seeing the tools in front of her, she gave us an exasperated look. “Mom, Teto, this is too much. You shouldn’t be giving a kid expensive magical tools for her birthday!”

Despite scolding us, she listened to our explanations of each tool and decided on one.

“I want this.”

Her final choice was a black, boxlike magic tool.

“The magic camera? You really want that?”

While nowadays, if you wanted to pass down someone’s appearance or a view, you needed to have an artist paint it, the precursors whose ruins lay buried beneath the Wasteland had photos. The item that Selene had chosen was one of their cameras, created by the dungeon.

“Yeah. I want a...photo? With you and Teto.”

Teto and I moved to each of her sides and squished her in a hug.

“We’ve raised you into such a good girl, Selene. Let’s take that picture!”

“We should do it here!”

We took the picture with Selene in the middle, and Teto and I flanking her.

“Okay, smile! Three, two, one, cheese!”

Adjusting the camera’s position, I hit the shutter with *Psychokinesis*. Then I grabbed the photo the camera created.

“Hee hee...”

“Mom, let me see... Wow, amazing! It really is exact!”

Having just taken a photo for the first time, Selene was in awe of how accurate it was. Teto, who wasn’t used to getting her picture taken, was in the middle of a blink with a weird look on her face, and you could see the bear golems’ heads outside of the window as they peeked inside, making it an all-around silly picture.

“One more! Mom, Teto, let’s take another one!”

“Okay, okay. Then we should pose for the next one.”

“I’ll hug her a bit closer this time!”

“Aww, Teto, that tickles!” Selene laughed amusedly as she twisted herself away from Teto.

Then we kept taking pictures until she was satisfied.

“That was fun! When it gets warmer, we should go on a picnic and take another picture of all three of us!”

“Yeah, that seems like it’d be fun.”

“I can’t wait for spring to come!”

As we all looked over the pictures lined up on the table, Selene started to fidget before running to her room and bringing something back out.

“Actually, I got presents for you two too. Here!”

“Selene, what is this?”

“Um, I bought you presents with the money I earned,” she replied.

The things she held out were scarves, probably bought from the general store. Apparently, she’d bought them with the earnings she’d received for healing the injured.

“It’s getting cold soon, after all! And they match!”

“Thank you, Selene. I’ll treasure it.”

“It’s so warm! Thank you, Selene!”

I need to cast some preservation magic on this and the photos, and a bunch of other kinds of enchantments to keep them safe! I thought to myself.

“I hope we’ll spend next year and all the years after that like this too,” I murmured to myself as I reflected on our casual daily happiness. I prayed that these peaceful days would continue forever, as we spent our winter inside the Wasteland of Nothingness.

In the Office of the King of Ischea

A dungeon had appeared in the grain-producing region of the country to our east, the Gald Beastman Nation. But I was relieved to hear reports that it was safely cleared and had disappeared.

If things had gone awry, the monsters might have overflowed from inside and destroyed the fields, plunging the entirety of Gald into a famine. There was a chance they would seize the opportunity to start a war, so we had begun preparations to sell them the foodstuffs from our own treasury. I was glad to learn that our efforts had been wasted.

“But a thirty floor A-rank dungeon... It is amazing it was cleared so quickly.”

“It truly is. In our own country, only a few parties could have done it, like the Swords of Daybreak in their heyday,” a young aide agreed in reply to my murmur.

It had been eight years since the A-rank party the Swords of Daybreak had progressed to the deepest depths of the dungeon at the heart of Apanemis. Though they had found the dungeon core, they had left it in place, considering how the region’s economy was centered around the dungeon itself.

And even they had spent more than ten years to get there. The adventurers who had cleared Gald’s dungeon in such a short time must have been outstanding indeed.

As I read over the simple report, I suddenly realized that I recognized the names of the adventurers who had cleared the dungeon.

“What...?!”

“Your Majesty, is something the matter?”

“To think that they’ve been in Gald!”

The B-rank adventurer, Chise the mage, and Teto, also B-rank. They were the two who had brought Elize’s body to a nearby town after she had been attacked by a devil-worshipping cult ten years prior, and had protected my daughter, Seleneriel. Though the lord of the region had put two and two together and sent his soldiers to guard them, the cultists attacked the town first, and the two adventurers had taken Seleneriel and ran.

“Finally, we have a lead...!”

For ten years we had searched Ischea, and the lead I had longed for was right before my eyes.

Reading further into the documents, I saw that Chise, one of the adventurers who cleared the dungeon, had brought her daughter Selene along with her. This Selene, despite her young age, had healed the adventurers that had been gravely injured during their dungeon dives, and had come to be known as the little saintess.

The girl’s features and physical age matched Seleneriel, and it

seemed that she had inherited her mother, the Saintess Elize's, healing magic.

“Dispatch men to Vil immediately, and investigate Chise and Teto the adventurers, along with the little Saintess Selene. If she truly is my daughter, Seleneriel, take her into our custody!”

I had found the daughter I thought was lost. The evil cultists who had threatened her had been thoroughly wiped out.

This time, I would take my daughter back.

Chapter 16: Negotiations for the Dungeon Core

After spending the winter keeping busy all to ourselves, spring came, and we went into town as usual.

“I’m gonna go see Kyal and Touli!”

“Ah, Lhant and Gray’s kids, huh?”

Selene told us her plans for the day on the flying carpet. Apparently she was going to play with her friends Kyal the catgirl and Touli the dog girl, who she’d known since nursery school. She’d spent the winter very enthusiastically embroidering a white handkerchief, saying she’d be exchanging it with them in the spring. Touli had also gotten a little brother the year before last, and she was all excited to see the adorably fluffy boy.

Both of her friends had high-ranked adventurer parents, who I saw and chatted with sometimes when we ran into each other at the guild or out on quests.

“Be careful!”

“Kaaay! I wanna ask some stuff about helping out at the guild, so wait for me there!”

“Got it! Both Lady Witch and Teto will be waiting!”

After arriving in town and seeing Selene off, we entered the guild, only for the usual receptionist to call out to us.

“Envoys have arrived to speak to you about the dungeon core from before winter...”

“We’ll have a chat with them, then.”

Teto and I were brought through to a reception room, and after a short wait, two beastmen appeared.

“I am Rollwacca, a private secretary sent as an envoy regarding the dungeon core issue, and this is His Highness, the third prince—”

“Gyunton, sent by His Majesty to see this matter through with my own eyes.”

Rollwacca, a rabbitman, and Prince Gyunton of the Gald Beastman Nation, who was a young catman with a distinctly colored coat (or rather, a tigerman) stood together. Rollwacca had thin facial features and a monocle, while Prince Gyunton was more than two times his size, with the physique of a fighter.

“Hello, my name is Chise. This is Teto, the other member of my party. We’re both B-rank adventurers. Nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet ya!”

Though Teto’s greeting made the prince’s face twitch, I just ignored it and sat down on the sofa.

“Firstly, I would like to thank you for clearing and destroying the dungeon that appeared in our breadbasket.”

That was all Prince Gyuntun said before leaving things to Rollwacca.

“Lady Chise, we have a number of questions regarding the dungeon core and your requested contract for clearing the dungeon.”

“And what might they be?”

“The Wasteland of Nothingness is a land covered by a great barrier erected by the gods, that no one has been able to enter since ancient times. Why do you desire it?”

I could pass in and out of the barrier freely, but there was no need for me to actually tell them that. Instead, I decided to just give them a noncommittal answer to smooth things over.

“As a mage, I’m interested in researching the great barrier. I need the contract so that I can examine the outside of the barrier as much as I want.”

“I see. But it would be difficult for us to give you the whole area, since the Wasteland is on the border of several other countries. All we would be able to acknowledge you as owner of would be the fourth of it that touches our country. We can also include the outer edge, if you develop it yourself.”

I took that to mean that if I developed it myself, they’d acknowledge me as the Wasteland’s owner, and wouldn’t need to collect taxes.

I see. It would be difficult to give the whole thing to me when it touches other countries. But if I get a fourth of it, I can just go to each country and make similar contracts there so I get it in writing that the Wasteland of Nothingness is all mine.

“Well then, I’ll draw up the magical contracts as per the main points brought up in our discussion,” Rollwacca said, writing contracts acknowledging Chise the adventurer as owner of the fourth of the Wasteland of Nothingness that touched the Gald Beastman Nation. “There will be three copies: one for the royal family, one for you, and another to be saved at the adventurers’ guild.”

It seemed that Prince Gyuntun had the authority to sign on behalf of the king.

I read over the contract terms once more, making sure that nothing had been left out. “That looks fine. Allow me to sign—”

“Stop one moment,” Prince Gyuntun cut in to stop me, his expression grim. “I have two questions. Why did you lie to us by claiming you want to research the barrier?”

“Lie?”

“We of the royal family have very sensitive noses and ears, you see. With enough training, we can tell if someone is lying by the scent of their sweat, or the sound of their heartbeat,” he told me with a sharp glare.

Yep, I’m in a different world after all, I thought to myself, impressed that there were people who could actually do that.

“Smelling a lady’s sweat... That isn’t a very pleasant thing to admit to.”

“I don’t do it because I like to. Do not try to change the subject so obviously.”

I swore internally when he didn’t get tripped up.

“I invoke my right to stay silent on the true reason.”

“Of course you do. My second question: why is your partner getting nothing? From what I heard just now, the contract serves your ends alone.”

Teto was the one to answer him. “I had a promise with Lady Witch that she would get the dungeon core this time.”

“‘This time,’ hmm? You’ve acquired other dungeon cores?”

She’d slipped up, but I answered him as if it didn’t matter. “We cleared a small five-floor dungeon before and got the core from that, but we don’t have it anymore.”

“I see. A pity...” he said, looking as if he was thinking carefully on something. He backed off, still weighing my words against my scent, and considering whether he should sign off on this nonsensical contract or give up on the dungeon core.

While he was ruminating, something I had equipped began loudly ringing. It was something like an alarm buzzer you’d have a child carry.

“Wh-What is that?!”

“Excuse me. It seems my daughter is in trouble. I’ll be stepping out for a moment,” I said, throwing the window open and jumping out of it into the sky.

“Lady Witch, Teto is coming too!”

Teto also jumped out of the window, hitting the ground and chasing after me.

“What in the world...?” I heard the beastman prince we’d left in the room murmur.

Chapter 17: Selene's True Identity

I flew over the town, searching for Selene's mana; I'd heard the sound of the security buzzer I'd made for her.

"There!"

Someone had probably messed with her on her way back from seeing her friends. I saw a group of townspeople gathering in a spot facing the main street, and immediately pinpointed where she was.

"Selene, are you okay?"

"Never fear, Lady Witch and Teto are here!"

"Mom, Teto! You came?!"

I landed in the center of the group of townspeople and Selene, and Teto caught up a second later. The security buzzer's built-in wire net trap had captured a group of unfamiliar men. The net itself had a sleep enchantment on it, so they'd been knocked out as the trap closed on them.

"What happened, Selene?"

"I don't know. They called me Seleneriel and surrounded me, saying my father was waiting, so we should go home. I got scared, and..." she explained, backing farther away from the men as she clung to my robe.

As she did, some of the townspeople spoke up.

"They showed up this winter, saying they were traveling merchants! But they spent the whole winter in this town when there was nothing here, and they were asking about Chise, so the rumor was that some noble was trying to recruit you."

"They might've been targeting Selene because of all that 'little saint' business after she went along with you on that dungeon trip."

"So it was a kidnapping. We called for the guards, so someone should be here soon!"

As they got a handle of the situation before my eyes, I took a look at the captured men. While they were wearing merchant's clothing, their features and overall vibe *did* feel different. The townspeople had a good eye for catching on so quickly that they had to be either auxiliaries to a noble or nobles themselves. Though the border town was a meritocracy and the townspeople were mostly big-hearted folk, the closer to central Gald you got, the more everything was arranged around each beast race and tribe, so there were few human attendants.

While all of this was happening, one man pushed his way through the crowd.

“You must be Lady Selene’s family, Lady Chise and Lady Teto, correct?” he said.

“Yes? Who are you.”

“You could say that I am these men’s superior. I’m terribly sorry; they were supposed to wait for you to appear, but I fear their patience ran short,” he said, bowing. I noticed that his features were finer than those of the collapsed men. He kind of felt like the third prince’s private secretary, Rollwacca. “If you would please allow me, I would like to explain everything to the three of you.”

I crossed my arms. The name Seleneriel was the same one that was engraved on the inside of Selene’s keepsake ring, so I felt like hearing them out.

“Mom, are you gonna talk to them?” Selene asked nervously.

I smiled at her. “I intend to. Don’t worry, your mom is strong!”

“Teto will protect you too, Selene!”

While we were talking, the guards that the townspeople had called arrived, and they carried the men to the adventurers’ guild with us.

If they were just kidnappers, we could have them thrown in jail, but they might have known something about the people who’d attacked Selene when she was a baby.

After the men were carried into the guild, they were unbound, and a few adventurers and guards—and, to my surprise, Prince Gynton of the Gald Beastman Nation and Rollwacca—sat in on the talks.

“Y-Your Highness! And Secretary Rollwacca too...” The superior of the men who had spoken to Selene was flustered, not thinking that a member of the royal family would be in attendance.

“You are one of the Kingdom of Ischea’s diplomats. Your country must have also gotten word that Lady Chise captured the dungeon and acquired the dungeon core. We are here to negotiate the matter”

“Y-Yes, we were aware.”

“You weren’t trying to steal the dungeon core from under our noses, were you?”

“N-No! Of course not!”

Since it didn’t look like the man was going to get on with talking after shrinking in fear of a royal from another country, I used my mana to put a bit of pressure out and make everyone focus on me.

“Well then, will you tell us who you guys really are?”

The men who’d hounded Selene had been freed from their bindings and purged of the sleep spell were all hanging their heads now that they understood the situation they’d put themselves in. The

man who identified himself as their superior introduced himself.

“We were sent by His Majesty the King of Ischea under orders to search for his missing daughter, Princess Seleneriel. We came to ascertain whether Lady Selene is actually Princess Seleneriel.”

“You have the wrong person! I’m Chise’s daughter, Selene!” Selene shrieked. Though I’d told her before that though I was raising her, she had a birth mother who had entrusted her to me before she died, it seemed that it hadn’t sunk in.

The adventurers and guards who were sitting in on the conversation were bewildered. They didn’t seem to quite get that the little girl they’d known all her life might be the child of someone really high up in another country either.

Within our whole group, it was only Prince Gynton and Rollwacca whose faces were clouded in thought.

“Your Highness,” I said, “are they telling the truth?”

“I don’t smell any lies. But I never expected Princess Seleneriel’s name to come up.”

“You know of her?” I asked him.

He explained, a troubled frown on his face. “I am a royal, after all. In my position, I hear much about the royal families of other nations. If I remember correctly, the saintess-*cum*-concubine was assassinated by a cult of devil worshippers eleven years ago, and the infant princess’s whereabouts were lost at the same time.”

When I asked further about the Saintess-*cum*-concubine’s characteristics, they all matched up with the woman who’d entrusted Selene to me. I also heard that the king—then still the crown prince—had searched for his daughter, but was unable to find her within the kingdom. He then destroyed the cult that had killed his concubine.

“I don’t know anything about that. I’m not a princess!”

“No, there is no mistaking it! The mythril and unicorn horn ring on your finger is evidence beyond a doubt!”

It seemed that His Majesty the King had gifted Princess Seleneriel the ring as a baby. It was a magical tool with purification and healing effects that only worked on Selene and her mother, Lady Elize. Selene’s real name was engraved inside.

“Yeah, I might be the only one who can use this ring, and my mom Chise did tell me she wasn’t my birth mother, but...”

Teto and I both hugged the bewildered Selene to calm her down.

One of our fellow adventurers from the local guild spoke up next. “So why is it that you only found her now, if you’ve been searching this whole time?”

“We searched within the kingdom for the first few years, but after hearing that Lady Chise and Teto fled north from the border town of Darryl, we had no idea of where they’d gone.”

While everyone else nodded, Prince Gyuntun narrowed his eyes, asking the leader of the search team, “The town of Darryl is in the Liebel Margravate to the north, is it not?”

“Yes, it is. After they fled, there was no record of them passing through any town or checkpoint, or utilizing any guild. From what we’ve learned about their past now, they suddenly appeared in this town seven years ago.”

“There’s an incredible distance between here and there. Do you mean to tell us that you spent four years on the run from that cult with an infant, in the Demon Den forest to the north of both Darryl and Vil?” Prince Gyuntun asked Teto and me, giving us an incredulous look. But he must have realized from our sweat and heartbeats that he was wrong, because his eyes widened. “No. Could it be that you...?”

He didn’t finish his sentence, but Selene’s shoulders shook a little as he spoke. That seemed to be confirmation enough, and Prince Gyuntun heaved a deep sigh. Though he didn’t say it, it looked like he knew we could go in and out of the Wasteland of Nothingness.

“I understand. That’s why you asked for that contract... I understand.”

The man was so badly shaken that he’d repeated himself. Once he calmed down, he told us that we would be continuing our negotiations later.

“Whatever the case, we are sure that you are Princess Seleneriel! Please, return home to your father, His Majesty King Alberd!”

“...Mom.”

“It’s okay. No matter what you choose, mom will protect you.”

“Teto will protect you too!”

Both of us squeezed Selene’s hands tight as we spoke.

Selene took a deep breath, steeling her resolve. “I want to meet my real dad. And I want to visit my real mom’s grave. After that, I want to think about things.”

“Understood. We will prepare in order to properly receive Princess Seleneriel, her adoptive mother Lady Chise, and Lady Teto.”

Since both sides were satisfied for now, the Princess Seleneriel Search Team was released, and they returned to the town’s inn. Taking our plans into consideration, we agreed to meet again in two weeks.

While this settled the case of the suspicious people who’d approached Selene, our negotiations with Gald over the dungeon core and the contract were still unfinished.

Chapter 18: Execution of the Contract and Getting Ready to Go Home

After the adventurers, guards, and the Princess Seleneriel Search Team all left, Selene, Teto, and I faced Prince Gyunton and Secretary Rollwacca.

“It’s no use trying to lie to me. You three can come and go from the Wasteland of Nothingness.”

“It’s true.”

“Then the meaning of this contract changes immensely.”

Prince Gyunton explained what was known about the Wasteland by other countries. Though it was a wasteland with absolutely nothing left in it, the area used to be where the precursors thrived, and had become the wasteland we knew after their collapse. The goddesses had put up the massive barrier to keep people away from the magical knowledge and tools that had brought their makers to ruin. Within the barrier, the wreckage of the precursors’ achievements lay waiting.

“Though even without the precursors, it wouldn’t be surprising for there to be a massive ore vein or the like there.”

“No, it wouldn’t.”

I thought about how, though nothing was left on the surface, there might be magic tools from that period left underground. While it was all currently under a mana drought, I might have to ferret them out before the wasteland’s ambient mana could reactivate them. But that would all be stuff for future me, so I put it off to the side.

“So you won’t sign the contract, then?”

“No, I will. While we now know that there are people who can go in and out of them, we can’t do anything about it. But we *would* like you to prioritize selling our country anything you find inside of the Wasteland of Nothingness. We will pay you fairly for it, of course.”

Those were some complicated terms. There might not be any magic tools within the wastelands, and the precursors might’ve already dug up all of the minerals two thousand years prior. But, on the flip side, I could also just sell things I created with Creation Magic to Gald, since they couldn’t see what happened inside the wasteland.

As I worried to myself, Prince Gyunton watched me with his slitted eyes. “To be completely truthful, it may be for the best not to

make a contract like this. While I don't know *how* you can do it, if I could get my hands on someone who could enter the Wasteland of Nothingness, we might be able to acquire new land."

"Your Highness..."

"No, it's fine. You raised Princess Seleneriel. Our relationship with Ischea might suffer if we push things too far. And Gald has few who have the aptitude to become a mage—we would be taking a great risk in any battle of magical technology with another country."

The number of mages a country had was equal to the number of magical researchers they had, which in turn ramified the state's grasp of basic magical theory. The dungeon core would be a strategic boon to Gald—a magic catalyst that would tip the balance of power in their favor. They could also use the massive magic stone to make a few dozen high-quality magic swords or other magical weapons; in the hands of the most fearsome beastmen of the Galdian army, they would vastly improve the nation's military strength—and as such its deterrence potential.

"This is why I believe I should prioritize fostering a friendly relationship with a skilled mage who can already pass in and out of the barrier, while also acquiring the dungeon core."

He was looking at his own people from an objective standpoint, grasping their strengths and weaknesses. His incredibly calculated, yet sincere handling of the situation moved my heart.

"Thank you for your honesty. Do you have any issues with the contract as it is?"

"No, I've resigned myself to it. Now, let's sign."

And so, I traded the dungeon core in exchange for sovereignty over the fourth of the Wasteland of Nothingness that bordered the Gald Beastman Nation.

Teto gave the core a reluctant look as I passed it to Prince Gyuntun. Once we got home, I used 100,000 MP worth of mana from my stock of mana crystals to create a large magic stone as a gift to ease her hurt feelings.

After that, we needed to prepare to leave for Ischea to meet Selene's father in two weeks. First off, we needed to raise her defenses.

"There'd probably be a lot of people who'd target a princess..."

Other than the devil-worshipping cult that had already been destroyed, there were probably people who would try to kidnap her for money, or to use her for political leverage. There was also the possibility that nobles could assassinate her via poison, or curses, or tons of other methods.

"First off, we need to increase Selene's own defenses. What kinds of skills would she need for living in noble society?"

I searched through the book I'd bought in town for skills I thought she might need. For now, she'd probably be able to keep up appearances within the nobility if she had the Etiquette skill. It'd be good for Teto and I to have too, since we'd be with her, so I made some skill orbs and used them while they were sleeping.

"Next up is defensive magic tools, maybe."

I created some that would ward against poison, reflect curses, and erect a strong barrier in emergencies.

"Lastly, I need to make sure we can run away whenever we need to."

Since I personally didn't have the Spatial Magic skill, I couldn't use teleportation spells, so I couldn't easily get back to the Wasteland. Even if the king was her real father, if he tried to push anything she didn't want to do, I needed to make us a means to bail out fast.

"I'll use fifty 10,000 MP mana crystals, and—*Creation*: transfer gate!"

I used 50,000 MP to make a single transfer gate magic tool.

"Ah, damn, this is only one half."

You needed at least two transfer gates to actually get anywhere. Thus, I spent a total of 100,000 MP from the mana crystals I'd saved up after creating another transfer gate. I'd put one in our home in the Wasteland, and stick the other one in my magic bag so I could set it up when it was needed and come home. I could also set it to only let people with a mana signature registered to the device through.

Other than the tools I was giving Selene, I also made some upgrades to the Wasteland management system.

While I was getting things ready, Selene asked me something.

"Hey, mom?"

"What's up, Selene?"

"You and Teto are coming with me to Ischea's capital, right?"

"Yep. They estimated it would take us a month to get there."

"What a pain, having to spend that long traveling..."

I felt the same way. But if we left the people who'd searched for Selene alone, and flew to Ischea's capital on our flying carpet on our own, it could cause problems. I could also see that creating a bigger vehicle would just make things even more annoying.

"But even if it's a pain, we need to enjoy it! And it's the capital, mom! You can take the A-rank exam!"

"Ahh, yeah, that was a thing."

In order to become A-rank adventurers and cross national borders freely, we needed to take the promotion exam held in any country's capital.

"You should do it while you have the chance! And it'd be amazing for the two of you to be A-rank adventurers!"

“If Lady Witch wants to aim for A-rank, Teto will too!”

If we were A-rank, we’d be treated as quasi-nobles in each country, and depending on the situation, we could be promoted to knighthood or a court mage role and be given a courtly rank.

“Well, I guess if I feel like it...”

While it’d probably be better to be a quasi-noble A-rank as Selene’s adopted mother instead of a basic adventurer, it wasn’t something that was absolutely necessary.

And so, the days passed, and the promised day two weeks later was upon us.

Chapter 19: The Road to Ischea

“Princess Seleneriel, please use this carriage with your family. We will be heading to Ischea’s capital from here.”

Having finished all of our travel preparations, we got into the carriage that the search team from Ischea had prepared for us. Though it was a pretty basic box-shaped carriage meant for escorting nobles, it made perfect camouflage for Selene’s status. But I had doubts about the carriage’s actual defenses, so I’d stealthily enchanted it.

“Mom...”

“Does your bum hurt because you aren’t used to riding in a carriage? Or do you need to pee?”

“I feel sick from the shaking...”

“I’ll rub your back, so let’s look at the scenery far out the window. We can ask to take a break a little bit sooner.”

As I rubbed Selene’s back, I used some healing and strengthening magic to reinforce the semicircular canals that were the cause of her motion sickness.

And on our journey—

“Princess Selene, we will cook!”

“I’ve cooked with mom, so I’m fine!”

The search team tried to stop Selene when she joined in to help with the cooking on our carriage journey, but they reluctantly backed down when they saw how good she was. Really, since the knights were mostly third sons and lower, they weren’t very good at cooking anyway.

Then, when we stopped in town to pick up cooking ingredients...

“Mom, they’re selling candy over there!”

“It seems that they’re popular sweet beans! Let’s go buy some, quick!”

“I’d like to drop into the bookstore, so let’s pop into the adventurers’ guild to take out some money before we go shopping.”

We tried to explore the town like tourists, but—

“Princess Selene, you mustn’t go anywhere like that! If you go off on your own, who knows what will come of it!”

“Okay, okay. *Sleep*. Teto, bring ’em to their rooms.”

I put them to sleep and we went out anyway. My excuse was that they needed rest after wearing out their nerves while guarding us on the road.

Other times, on our journey—

“Rocks have fallen on the road, and we can’t get through!”

“This is easy... *Break Stone!*”

“Everyone, please help us out!”

I used earth magic to break the huge boulders that had fallen onto the road into smaller, easy-to-carry pieces. Teto summoned the bear golems (who had accompanied us in their core form out of worry for Selene), having them use their numbers to clear the debris off to the side of the road.

“Bandits have appeared on the highway!”

“If that’s all, then... *Earth Bind!*”

I manipulated the ground to catch the bandits, carrying them to the next town to turn them in.

“This child, someone save this child!”

“Pay me three silver later, okay? *Heal!*”

I used healing magic on a child who’d been kicked by a raging horse. Open fractures, massive blood loss, internal injuries, brain bleeding from when their head hit the ground after being kicked... They were nearly at death’s door, but I managed to heal them internally.

Every time any problems popped up that could delay us, I used magic to solve it.

As an aside, though, Selene started getting sick of traveling by carriage about three days in, so I used Creation Magic to make some board games we could sneakily play.

Used some strengthening and healing magic on the horses pulling the carriage—

Used magic to reduce the weight of the carriage itself—

Slipped some potions into the horses’ water—

Thanks to raising the horses’ speed, we made it over the border in one week, and to the capital in another week.

“Huh? It took us one month to get to Vil, so how did it only take us half of one to get home?” The search team members wondered.

“So, what’s gonna happen now? Are we going straight to meet Selene’s dad?”

“No, we must report to His Majesty so that he can make arrangements to meet. Thus, Princess Selene will be staying in Lady Elize’s church.”

“Mom’s...” murmured Selene, gripping the ring her mother had left her tight.

And so we headed straight to the capital’s grand cathedral, where Liriel and the other four goddesses were worshiped. There, we disembarked from the carriage and were led into the rectory.

“...Lady Elize?”

“Huh?”

An elderly priest appeared before us. When Selene cocked her head to the side in confusion, he shook his head lightly before greeting us. “Hello, I am Marius, cardinal of the Church of the Five Great Goddesses.”

“H-Hello, I’m Selene!”

“Ho ho ho, you’re the spitting image of Lady Elize as a child. For a moment, I mistook you for her,” he said, greeting her affectionately before he turned to us. “I have heard about the situation. Thank you so much for raising Princess Selene. May I ask your names?”

He must have already heard all about my appearance and age, because he didn’t seem particularly surprised.

“I’m Chise the Witch. B-rank adventurer.”

“And I’m Teto, the swordswoman, also B-rank!”

The moment Cardinal Marius heard our names, shock took over his expression.

“Lady Chise? Could you really be the one behind the orphanage reformation in the Old Capital?”

“Mom, what did you do?” Selene asked, looking curious. I hadn’t told her about what we’d gotten up to before meeting her, since I didn’t think it was important enough to mention, but it wasn’t like I was hiding it.

“A little bit before we met you, I helped some orphanage kids I got to know learn how to make money for themselves,” I told her as if it was nothing, but Cardinal Marius shook his head exaggeratedly.

“It was not just that. Lady Chise used her own funds to teach potion mixology and papermaking, and the textbooks are now used for instructing all orphans, while the paper home industry funds the relief of various socially vulnerable people! You are a saintess who gave hope to so many people!”

It sounded like the orphans had kept up with things after I’d left them. The kids I’d taught mixology and papermaking in Dungeon City’s orphanage went on to be sent around the country to introduce the same systems and spread them to other orphanages. The increased production of potions especially had raised health conditions throughout the country, while the increased production of paper allowed children and widows to make a home industry out of making things like paper bags and envelopes.

Currently, plant paper made from wood was an important source of funds for the church, and was a commercial good exported from Ischea to other countries.

“Wow, mom, you’re amazing!”

Selene’s birth mother Lady Elize had traveled to various places and became a saintess by saving the people through healing, while I,

her adopted mother, taught the socially disadvantaged the skills to survive on their own, and was treated much the same. Selene was pretty well situated in the Ischean Church.

It looked like the search team who escorted us here didn't know about any of that either.

"The three of you are important guests to our cathedral. Please, treat it as if it were your home."

And so, we were assigned a number of nuns and brought to stay in guest rooms within the cathedral rectory. After having a simple but well-balanced, ascetic meal, we cleansed ourselves with magic before changing into our pajamas.

"I want to have a bath..." Selene murmured, having been used to bathing since she was a child.

"Yeah, me too. Tomorrow, let's search for a big public bath or something."

"Okay!"

During our travels by carriage, we didn't really want to make our instant bathtub in front of the search team, so instead we just used *Clean* on ourselves every day.

While we were relaxing in the evening before bed, Selene made another request.

"Hey, mom, Teto..."

"What is it, Selene?"

"I want to know what my mom did..."

She must've been talking about her birth mother, Lady Elize.

"So I want to try working in the church."

"Okay. Let's go ask Cardinal Marius tomorrow."

"Okay! Thank you, mom..." she said, moments before she started snoring softly. I turned the lights off so they wouldn't wake her and went to sleep myself.

Chapter 20: Helping in the Clinic

The next day, after we'd eaten, we requested a meeting with the cardinal and were able to see him that afternoon. I appreciated that he made time for us when he must have had a lot of work to do.

"What might I be able to do for you today, Princess Selene and Lady Chise?"

"We've come to ask something of you while we're staying here."

"Please, ask away."

"Selene wants to understand the Saintess Lady Elize's work firsthand. Would it be possible for her to help out at the church as thanks for letting us stay here?"

"That would be wonderful for us as well! All right, I'll make arrangements."

And a day after he agreed, Selene was dressed adorably in a child-sized nun outfit. And I—

"It looks good on you, mom!"

"You're cute, Lady Witch!"

"Wait, why am *I* wearing it too?"

Quite honestly, I'd thought I'd only lined up Selene for the position, but apparently I was helping out too. I just resigned myself to the job pretty quickly.

Our plans were to help out at the church two days a week, then spend the rest of the time sightseeing in the capital. I wanted to drop in on the guild to introduce ourselves, then check out the capital's bookstores and big library ASAP.

"Well then, follow me. This is our clinic."

A group consisting of Selene, me, Teto as a guard, *plus* a knightly looking person sent from the palace, were led by a nun to the annex. The clean building looked to be something like a doctor's office. I was impressed that they'd set aside an entire building for healing, compared to the church in Apanemis—Father Paulo had handled all of that work personally.

"Our job is to heal the patients. Since we haven't seen either of your work ourselves, I will be with you all day as support."

"Thank you."

"Th-Thank you very much!"

Though Selene had helped out back at the adventurers' guild as an apprentice healer, she was flustered at the clinic's distinct vibes. I was

a little worried, but once she got to work, I realized I had nothing to worry about at all.

“*Search*. You have fractures in both your ribs and spine. *Heal*.”

“Everyone with minor injuries, please gather over here. *Area Heal*! Okay! You’re all ready to go back out that way.”

“You’ve got a little case of food poisoning. *Antidote*. I’ve gotten rid of the germs, but don’t push yourself too hard, okay?”

A stream of patients were carried into the clinic: someone who’d broken their leg from a long fall at work, another looking for relief from a chronic infection, yet another who’d fallen ill quite suddenly—the queue went on and on.

Selene healed them all, one spell at a time.

“I can’t let myself lose to Selene. *Hi-Heal*.”

I focused on tending to the patients in too dire a state for Selene to handle given the limits of her knowledge and experience.

“Huh... They’re both still so small, but they’re better at healing than us... Just what you’d expect from saintesses!”

Though I was happy to have my healing skills praised, I smiled bitterly at being treated like I was younger than them when I was twenty-five years old. I was pretty sure I was older than the nun who made the comment too.

After we got through the early morning rush, most of the people coming in throughout the day were people who’d been injured at work.

“Hold on! It’ll be okay!”

“—Both an arm and a leg severed. Selene, you do the leg. I’ll do the arm.”

“Okay. *Clean, Hi-Heal*.”

A man came in, an arm and a leg ripped off in some sort of accident. Really, I could’ve done it all myself, but I split the healing with Selene.

Sanitizing the wound and the arm that they’d brought with them with *Clean*, I used healing magic to reattach it. I did it in steps; first the bone, then the nerves, blood vessels, muscle fibers, and finally skin, in that order, healing it with ease. While it was a bit of a pain to reattach things, it took a lot less mana than regenerating the whole thing, which is what I would’ve done if their limbs had been lost.

That guy was the most critically injured person of the day, and after eating lunch, we kept up the pace until evening.

“You’re kidding... How can your mana hold out that long? ...Er, my lady?” asked the nun who’d led us there that morning.

“I’ve got a big mana pool,” I told her. Since I had more than 100,000 MP total, I didn’t have much problem healing through the whole day.

“I don’t have as much mana as mom does, but I’m using it strategically.”

Selene currently had 20,000MP. With that much, her life span would probably be longer than the average person, maybe hitting around one hundred.

But I’d noticed something lately: when people had a lot of mana and their aging started to slow, they’d keep growing normally until they hit the prime of their life. That gave me a *lot* of questions about why mine had ground to a crawl so early on, and hit the point where I wouldn’t age at all. I needed to investigate and find the truth...but I digress.

And so the day ended, but that night—

“Please, teach us your healing magic!”

Whether they had the talent but not the power or already knew healing magic, the nuns hounded us incessantly.

“Mom...”

“Ahh... Okay, okay. Is there an empty room somewhere, then? I’ll give you guys a lecture.”

Thus, a very sudden lesson in healing began, focusing on anatomical drawings to supplement their mental images, helping them understand the minute functions of a human body.

I told them about using the unaspected spell *Search* to identify the affected parts of the body, then limiting *Heal* (which would usually be used on the whole body) to only the affected areas, and using medicine at the same time to save mana. I also included diagrams of cellular structure to further supplement their library of mental imagery and open up the possibility of finer-grained repair to them.

I explained the advantage they’d have using *Search* with other treatments, allowing them to detect latent illnesses or complications early on.

I taught them training drills to increase their mana so they could use healing spells more often.

As I went through all this, the nuns took notes on paper supplied by the church. I answered each of their questions, smiling wryly at how similar it was to an actual university lecture. I had no idea that the notes they were writing would later form the basis of the church’s healing pedagogy and be called the Saintess’s Textbook, separate from their grimoire.

Thanks to my lecture, nuns who hadn’t been able to use healing magic before could do it after putting my training methods into practice, while others who had already been able to heal grew even more talented.

Chapter 21: The Reunion between Father and Daughter

On one of our days off, I set out into the capital with Teto and Selene (plus a number of guards sent by the palace).

“Just what I expected from the capital. There were a lot of books I hadn’t seen before.”

As I bought books one after another, Teto and Selene enjoyed some treats from the food stalls. I wasn’t sure if it was because of the influence from Teto and I or not, but Selene wasn’t that interested in clothing or jewelry. The guards watched over us from a short distance away, nearly fainting seeing a princess like Selene buy and eat from food stalls like a commoner, but we ignored them.

Once we’d enjoyed what the capital had to offer, we visited the adventurers’ guild, and, of course, there were no people who’d mess with a little girl like Selene. They might’ve thought she was a relative of a noble traveling incognito, given how obvious it was that there were some neatly dressed guards following her from a distance.

“Excuse me. We’re adventurers from abroad, here to introduce ourselves.”

“It’ll be nice working with you!”

“Oh, how nice of you.”

Teto and I greeted the receptionist before asking about the A-rank exam.

“When will the next A-rank promotion examination take place?”

“A-rank? I’m sorry, we keep those events private...”

It seemed she had the wrong idea. Yes, it was a lot easier to imagine a bunch of young girls wanting to see the higher-ranked adventurers that they admired all gathered at once than it was to think we’d be taking the exam ourselves. Teto and I pulled our guild cards out.

“We’re B-rank, and we’ve qualified to take the exam. Please, check our cards.”

“Wh—?! I-I’m so sorry! I’ll do that!”

And so we were allowed to register for the next exam, and we got the details on the whole thing. The exam itself would be an elimination tournament between all of the B-rank adventurers qualified to take it.

“So it isn’t just us doing a hard quest and getting judged on that.”

“We used to do it that way, but there were cases where the examinees died. It’s done as a tournament now in order to make sure we don’t lose any valuable, talented adventurers.”

While adventurers needed to be able to show how powerful they were in parties, they also needed to know how long they could hold up solo in emergencies. Thus, instead of a normal tournament that could be decided by luck, it would consist of one-on-one elimination battles.

“All right. Any questions, Teto?”

“Hmm... I don’t really get what an elimination battle is! So basically, we just have to win?”

“Well, yes, to put it simply.”

“Then Teto will train lots, so she won’t lose!”

After smiling a bit hesitantly at Teto’s declaration, the receptionist gave her one warning. “While there isn’t a problem with you using the training grounds, the other qualified B-rank adventurers will be collecting information on their rivals. In that sense, the battle has already begun.”

Since it was an elimination tournament, you’d know your opponents’ tricks from the second battle on. It was a test of how you’d deal with taking countermeasures against people, or them having countermeasures against you. She was hinting to us that collecting intel on other adventurers before the tournament could have an effect on the matches, and it was important for us to be on guard to keep our secret weapons under wraps. But Teto, bless her heart, didn’t seem to get it, and I couldn’t help but smile a bit.

“The exam is three months from now.”

“Got it. Thank you for telling us everything.”

“Thank you! We’ll be back!”

With that, we returned to the church, staying there for another while. Sometimes, other adventurers would sneakily come check on Teto and me at either the cathedral or the healing clinic. They were probably some of the other exam takers, or at least were sent by them. We spent our days there until we finally got a fixed date to see Selene’s dad, the king.

“Princess Seleneriel, Lady Chise, Lady Teto. Please, come this way.”

The palace sent a carriage for us, and we were brought in through a back entrance before being led to a waiting room.

“Now, please wait a while as we get Her Highness properly dressed.”

Maids appeared out of nowhere, moving to Selene’s sides and guiding her away.

“Huh, wait, mom?! Hel—”

“Go get all prettied up!”

“See you soon!”

She was whisked away to a waiting bath, where they spent a good while cleaning her up. They put her in a dress that matched her height, and a proper princess was born. But, seeing as how she wasn't used to having other people wash her, she was absolutely drained by the time she got back.

“Mooom. This is embarrassing, and it's hard to move in.”

“Well, it's part of your duty as a royal. For now, let's just get these back on you.”

I'd sent Selene off to the bath with some defensive magic, but when she got back, I fitted her with the magic tools I'd made. The maids gave me looks for adding boorish accessories that didn't match her dress, but I needed to keep her safe.

“His Majesty the King will see you shortly.”

“Uuurgh, I'm nervous.”

“It's okay. Have some tea and calm down.”

“Selene, these sweets are delicious. It'd be a waste not to eat them!”

Teto and I were enjoying the palace's delicious tea, not nervous in the slightest. It smelled delicious, and was easy to drink. It must have been the way they brewed it, and the quality of the tea leaves. It was completely different from the tea leaves I made with Creation Magic (500 MP per can) at home.

“Where do these tea leaves come from?”

“The blend is called Roseleen, from the territory of Dazil. It is a favorite of the royal family.”

“Huh, that's nice. I might buy some sometime.”

“Mom, you're taking this all too well!”

“Selene, eat these tea biscuits with us. They're yummy.”

“Ugh, Teto, you too? ...Ah, they are yummy.”

Thanks to the Etiquette skill I'd given her before, and lessons in manners from the nuns at the cathedral who were former noblewomen, Selene drank her tea with beautiful (if hastily learned) movements.

As we waited, a knock rang out, and men entered the room. One was the thirty-something young king, with two who were probably aides: one civil official and one guard knight. From the knight's demeanor and quality of mana, I could tell that he would probably be able to go toe to toe with Arsus, an A-rank adventurer.

Selene grimaced nervously as the men walked in, but the king gave her a quiet smile.

“This is an unofficial meeting. I will allow you to be at ease.”

“Okay. I'll take your word for it,” I said. I'd held back when he

walked in, but now I reached for another cookie and asked the maids to pour me another cup of tea. Selene whispered my name, elbowing me, but I was doing it intentionally to soften the tension in the room. Plus, I was ready to take Selene and go back to the Wasteland of Nothingness based on the king's response, but...

"Allow me to formally introduce myself. I am the King of Ischea and Seleneriel's father, Alberd."

"I'm Selene's adoptive mother, Chise the Witch, B-rank adventurer."

"I'm Selene's big sister, Teto!"

King Alberd's gaze fell on Selene, who nervously introduced herself. "I'm Selene, both my adoptive mom Chise and my birth mom Elize's daughter. Are you my dad?"

"Yes, I am, Seleneriel."

"Um... I'm not quite used to the name Seleneriel yet... Can you just call me Selene?"

"I see. All right. But you've gotten so big..."

The king stood up, walking over to Selene and pulling her little body close. Whether it was from actually feeling how much his daughter had grown, or being moved because his efforts to get her back had finally borne fruit, he hugged her tightly.

"Dad?"

"That devil cult will never rip us apart, and I will never lose you again!"

The maids and the men he'd brought with him were moved to tears at their reunion. Teto and I just watched silently.

After a moment and a little calming down, the king let go of Selene, looking towards us.

"Thank you for saving Selene and raising her until now. I also thank you for bringing Elize and her entourage's remains to a nearby town."

He couldn't be *too* openly thankful, being a king and all, but I could see it clearly in his eyes.

"I'll accept your thanks," I said, giving him a little bow.

The king nodded in satisfaction before looking at Selene again. "Selene, from this day forward, let's regain the time we've lost as a family here in the palace."

"Uh, um..."

Selene didn't know how to react to his powerful statement, so I stopped things there.

"As her adoptive mother, I can't accept that."

"What?"

"Selene has lived a life similar to a commoner. Would she really be happy, suddenly made to live like a royal?"

The king's aides' eyebrows twitched.

Chapter 22: The Teleportation Gate

King Alberd's aides all looked annoyed at my disrespectful attitude, but the king stopped them with a little silent coercion before questioning me.

"My daughter and I have finally reunited. Wouldn't she be the happiest living together with me once again? And I can give her whatever she wants with my influence and wealth," he told me.

I just looked back at him coldly. "She might suffer from the differences in values between commoners and nobility, or manners. And I've taught her how to live independently, so she can get what she wants on her own," I said, inwardly adding that I could give her everything she wanted too.

"...Chise the adventurer. Now that I think of it, I've forgotten to reward you for raising her. How much will it take for you to accept Selene living with me? Or is it a court rank you're after?"

"I don't need money or peerage. What I want is the happiest life for Selene," I replied, shooting down his offer.

The king gave me a wry smile back. "You're just like the reports said, refreshingly uninterested in political power," he said, shooting the aides behind him a look. Their annoyance at my rudeness vanished, and they looked at us calmly.

Apparently, he was testing us. He'd wanted to meet Selene as soon as we arrived at the capital, but he had us investigated for our actions in forming her way of living, thoughts, and personality.

"From what I've been told, Selene is a good girl, energetic with an independent spirit. But I realize that those qualities don't match up with royal tradition. Elize had a hard time, after all."

Selene's mother Lady Elize had been a saintess of the church, but she was originally a commoner. Things didn't end when she became a concubine, because she needed to learn etiquette becoming of a member of the royal family.

"What's best for Selene, huh...? If she doesn't want to break her bond with you as parent and child, we have the option of you becoming one of my concubines yourself, Miss Chise."

"I refuse! Who the hell would marry you?!" I replied reflexively at the thirty-something man, with his nice face, rank, and wallet. Teto hugged me protectively.

"How sad. It would have been great to have a skilled mage such as

yourself on hand.”

“Your Majesty, that was a jest too far,” admonished the man who looked like a civil official—Ischea’s prime minister.

The king sighed jokingly at my refusal, but the maids serving us looked pretty disgusted. “What’s wrong, you guys? You’re so cold.”

“No, we just saw His Majesty, the king of our nation, propositioning a little girl.”

“Right now, including Her Majesty Queen Aria, you have three wives. If Lady Elize was still alive, you would have four. It was said you had vast tastes five years ago when you married your youngest concubine at eighteen, but you’ve finally tried to make a pass at a little girl...”

“Dad...”

“Why should I be getting looks like that from my maids and my own daughter! And Chise is twenty-five years old! She’s older than my youngest concubine!”

Having learned about society in the Beastman Nation, Selene was more or less familiar with their custom of polygamy. The trend was especially popular among adventurers, even Selene’s friend Touli had two moms who were friendly with each other. But wanting to marry a legal loli like me was a whole other order of fetishism.

“I’m Selene’s mom, but I have no intention of getting married. I just want you to consider all the angles for the sake of her happiness.”

“Wait, why do I feel like I got dumped...? Whatever. Then what about becoming Selene’s guards-slash-maids? I’ll give Selene her mother’s old royal villa, where she can slowly get used to life as a royal.”

I could live with that offer. “I see. Then, as her mother, I’ll become her maid and watch over her until she gets married.”

While becoming one of the king’s concubines was out of the question, becoming Selene’s maid would be fine. Selene seemed worried that she was stealing my life in the Wasteland of Nothingness from me, but I smiled to show her I didn’t care.

“Mmmrgh... It’s true that Selene will marry one day. Six, seven years from now... Aah, why must I only have that long with my daughter?!”

Seeing the king suffer because of the word “marriage,” Teto and I teased him.

“Girls mature fast, so it might be even sooner than that.”

“Now that I think about it, Selene was really friendly with one boy back in Gald.”

“I WON’T ACCEPT THAT!”

The king had an amusing reaction to our little jokes, but Selene gave us a look.

“Mom, Teto, don’t tease my dad. And the only boy I was friendly with was Touli’s two-year-old brother.”

Teto and I giggled, fully aware of that. The boy Teto had mentioned was indeed Selene’s doggirl friend Touli’s little brother. He was an adorable baby, with fluffy fur and big eyes, and the two girls’ other friend Kyal was watching him grow up with them.

“And I don’t want to treat mom like a servant or whatever.”

“That’s too bad. Then we’ll just have to quietly go home after we visit Lady Elize’s grave so we can find a good man for you back in Gald.”

“Just when I thought I had my daughter back! I won’t let her leave again!”

If we kept joking with the stubborn king, we’d never get anywhere, so I decided it was time for my trump card.

“Well then, would you be so kind as to clear the maids out of the room? I have something important I want to talk to you about.”

“All right. It looks like Chise has some important business. Begone.”

The king and his prime minister nodded, sending the maids out of the room. Once they were gone, it was Teto, Selene, and me against the king, prime minister, and the knight.

The sudden change from a light mood to seriousness made Selene nervous. I then suggested a compromise.

“My offer is to have Selene commute to the palace from where we live, and have her get used to things gradually.”

“Where you lived. Yes, it wouldn’t be impossible for her to commute between the cathedral and the palace, but what do you all think?”

“From my perspective as knight commander, it would make the princess harder to guard and easier to attack. If at all possible, I believe it would be wise to have her live at the cathedral as she is now until we’re all prepared, and send teachers there.”

The knight—knight commander, to be more accurate—judged that from the standpoint of the people guarding her, it would be best of all to have her in the palace. Still, it would be good enough and easier on both her mentally and the guards physically to have the royal family send etiquette teachers to the cathedral instead.

But I shook my head. “No, I meant literally. I’ll connect our home to the palace,” I said, pulling the Transfer Gate I’d made previously with my Creation Magic out of my magic bag and laying it on the floor. The irrelevant thought ran through my mind that I’d need to apologize to the maids if it damaged the long carpet.

“What is this? It seems to be some kind of gate magic tool...” asked the prime minister.

I answered honestly. "It's a teleportation gate. It's a tool that connects the space between a pair of gates."

"A *teleportation gate*?!"

The three men were absolutely shocked. None of them were mages, but it seemed they knew about them.

"I-Is it real?! A magical tool that allows for teleportation truly exists?!"

Teleportation magic was a particularly difficult kind of magic within the school of spatial magic. The distance one could travel also depended on the size of their mana pool, so it was rare enough that maybe a single court mage might be able to use it. It was also a spell that I was secretly practicing.

"Just try it yourselves."

Setting the gate to free transit, I took Selene through it. Once we were through the gate, which rippled like water, we were back in our house.

"Ahh, of course it's stuffy in here, what with us spending a whole two months away. We've gotta air it out," I commented as I threw the doors and windows open, bringing the bear golems working the fields into view. Since they were bad at detailed tasks like pulling weeds or harvesting, they instead just picked up the crops that fell to the ground, threw them into the compost, and watered everything. The fallen crops would then become new earth for the Wasteland of Nothingness.

As I puttered around, the knight commander came through the gate to make sure it was safe, before heading back through to the palace and escorting the king and prime minister through.

"Have we really been teleported somewhere we've never seen? So this is the home that Selene lived in..."

"Yep, it is," I said, looking around. It was a normal small house with a kitchen, dining table, rooms for each of us, and a workroom. Outside of the window was a home garden and the bear golems who took care of it, and while there was a little forest of trees farther out, there were wastelands even farther past them.

"Where is this? If you say this is where Selene lived... This must be the Gald Beastman Nation."

"No. This isn't in a country at all—it's inside the Wasteland of Nothingness's grand barrier."

The king was shocked, the prime minister understood, and the knight commander moved to guard the Teleportation Gate as an escape route.

"I had looked into the contract that Prince Gynton of Gald made with Miss Chise regarding the Wasteland of Nothingness, but to think that she could come and go from inside..."

“This explains why we couldn’t find Seleneriel. If they ran here, no one could catch them. Chise. Could this teleportation gate be a tool of the precursors you found inside the Wasteland?”

“Yes, it was.” Really, I’d just made it with my Creation Magic, but either way, it was something that mankind couldn’t create these days. “I was thinking that we could put one side of the gate inside the villa you’re giving Selene so that she can come and go.”

“So that’s why you asked for me to clear the room...” murmured the king, before his fatherly persona fell away to reveal the king beneath. “Chise. Would you sell these teleportation gates to our country?”

“Unfortunately for you, no. First off, if you used them, you could easily move soldiers wherever you wanted. I don’t want to sell anything that could be used for war.”

If they put one side of the gate inside the soldiers’ station, and had a spy carry the other in a magic bag, they could immediately deploy the military anywhere. That was incredibly dangerous. Plus—

“And don’t even think of sending the knights through the gate in Selene’s villa to occupy the Wasteland. I can make it so only people whose mana I’ve already registered can move through it.”

Plus, even if they did get through, all I needed to do was break the gate, and all those people who’d come through would be trapped inside the Wasteland of Nothingness. And though our house was surrounded by a barrier to stop the mana from escaping, they’d be exposed to the mana drought the moment they took a step outside of it. The intense expulsion of mana from their bodies would put anyone who wasn’t used to it into a state of lethargy, and anywhere outside of the barrier wouldn’t have many resources to speak of at all.

The Wasteland was just that much of a meaningless, worthless location.

“...I see. Then I’ll give up on the teleportation gates. Well, Selene, what would you like to do?” the king said, transforming back into a father now that he’d given up on owning the gates.

“If possible, I want to stay in the house where I lived with my mom Chise and Teto. But I also want to learn more about dad and my mom Elize,” she answered, giving the king a puppy-dog look before asking if that was selfish.

“Of course not. Up until now, you’d known nothing about your real parents. You can learn gradually from now on. I’ll grant you permission to set up the gate within your villa. Then, you can come and go from this house as you please.”

“He’s right. If palace life gets too much for you, you just need to run back home. Running isn’t a bad thing.”

Both the king and I wanted to be with Selene, so we compromised

with the setting up of the teleportation gate. Whether Selene chose to marry out somewhere, to leave me completely and live as a royal, or stay with me and live as a commoner, I would turn off one of the sides of the gate.

“Your Majesty... From the perspective of the Royal Guard, I cannot support the placement of a magic tool that will directly link the inside of the palace with the outside world. And if Miss Chise was able to cross the barrier and bring Miss Teto and Princess Seleneriel with her, that means that she could also bring in others.”

“I agree with the commander. Though Miss Chise says that only those with registered mana signatures can pass through the gate, she is also the one who sets those. While we do owe her a debt of gratitude for protecting and raising the princess, there is still the chance...”

“Lady Witch would never do that,” Teto muttered unhappily at the two men’s objections.

Hearing his two aides’ opinions, the king looked at me with a pondering expression. “So they say, Chise. What do you think?”

“It’s true. But we can sign a magical contract that states that you’ll keep any servants who might find out about the gate from leaking the info, and that Teto and I won’t use the gate to send anyone else through.”

Magical contracts such as the one I signed with Prince Gynton were strong, staying in place until the contract was either voided or completed. The contents of the contract had a continuity close to that of a curse, and would need to be complied with no matter what.

“Then we have no problems. We’ll have the contract cover the placement of the teleportation gate and its confidentiality. But what will you ask for in return?”

The stronger the magical contract, the bigger the compensation would need to be established regarding its restrictions.

“In return, huh? How about being recognized as owner of the part of the Wasteland of Nothingness touching the Kingdom of Ischea?”

“The same thing as your contract with Gald? Hmm...” The king looked towards his prime minister, who gave a troubled nod. “That’s fine. But it will have to be after Selene’s debut to let the nobles know she has returned. After that, I’ll acknowledge you as the owner.”

Since there wasn’t a single country that could currently lay a hand on the Wasteland, they had no choice but to acknowledge my ownership.

“I see. Thank you. Then let’s head back to the palace, sign the contract, and get the gate set up within Selene’s villa.”

And so, we all passed back through the teleportation gate to the palace and signed the contract. Then, we headed to the villa that

Selene's mother Lady Elize had used, setting the gate in a room connected to the one Selene would use. Though the gate itself was set up so that only those who were registered could use it, it would still be bad for anyone to find out about it, so I cast some cognizance-obstructing magic on it to put it in the blind spot in everyone's consciousness.

And finally—

“Dad, I want to take mom, Chise, and Teto to Elize's grave...”

“Hmm... That's a bit difficult.”

“Why?” Selene asked, only for the king to show some disapproval.

“The royal tomb where Elize is buried is a sacred graveyard where other royals also sleep. I can't give anyone below an appropriate status permission to enter.” According to custom, the *least* we'd need to be before they could let us inside is a noble, or another trusted status. “Though I may trust you as Selene's adoptive mother, you're still only a B-rank adventurer.”

“I see... If we became quasi-noble A-rank adventurers, would you give us permission?”

“I would. It shouldn't be a problem if I have A-rank adventurers accompany Selene to guard her.”

While I hadn't really been feeling motivated to take the A-rank exam up until then, hearing that lit a fire under me.

“Teto, let's do our best in the exam.”

“Roger! We'll both become A-rank so we can unashamedly go to visit Selene's mom's grave!”

Thus, Selene's audience with the king ended, and the three of us ignored the king's reluctant gaze and headed through the villa gate back to the Wasteland to relax.

Chapter 23: Unexpected Reunions in the Capital

Selene began hopping between the palace and the Wasteland of Nothingness every other day. Although each side was able to spend half of the week with Selene, there was a single day that we just couldn't decide on.

As sparks flew between the king and I as we tried to decide who she'd spend that seventh day with, Teto had just asked Selene herself what she wanted to do.

"Lady Witch, Selene wants to keep helping out at the church."

"Mom... Dad... Can I keep helping at the clinic?"

"Volunteering at the church's clinic... I can't argue with that."

"Elize also volunteered once a week. I understand. I'll make the arrangements."

Thus, Selene spent three days taking various lessons at the palace and three days resting in the regenerating nature of the Wasteland. On the last day, she would volunteer at the church's clinic.

I put my trust in the king and the guard knights while she was at the palace.

"It's fine. They're Ischea's knights. They'll definitely protect Selene."

"Lady Witch, you're leaking mana. Calm down. And didn't you send her with her tools?"

After Teto told me to calm down, I suppressed my mana and nodded to her. "Yes, I did. A magical security device, okayed by His Majesty."

I believed in the king and the guard knights. But on the off chance that my precious Selene might get hurt or in some trouble, I had her equipped with a security buzzer. It had the same functions as the one that had gone off in Gald and caught the knights who were searching for her, and I'd even changed the design to something that wouldn't look out of place in the palace. I finally calmed down when I remembered that.

"Then we should be going too."

Passing through a newly set up separate teleportation gate, we arrived inside a private, isolated house in one corner of Ischea's capital. The king had suggested we go back and forth between the Wasteland and the gate in Selene's villa, but even if I was her adopted

mother, it would still be a little iffy for adventurers to be coming and going from there. Instead, I pulled out the funds to buy a little house, where we put a third gate.

On the days that Selene was at the palace or the clinic, Teto and I would either pop in to Gald, where we were known, or wander around Ischea's capital.

"Ah, Selene would probably like these sweets."

Our most recent diversion was finding foods in the lower city to eat with Selene back at home on her days off while we listened to her tell us about life in the palace. I'd also gotten permission to enter the capital's library, and while I was reading a ton of various books, Teto had revived her hobby of fighting mock battles at the adventurers' guild's training grounds. We also took some routine quests from the guild to do on our walks, and watched Selene grow on her days off as we waited for the A-rank exam.

"I heard that the lost Princess Seleneriel's back at the palace!"

"Elize the saintess's kid? The one that went missing eleven years ago?"

"I heard she'd been protected and raised by someone in the church."

"I've seen a little girl who looks like Lady Elize healing at the clinic lately. Apparently she learned magic from the saintess Lady Elize had entrusted her to, and she's damn good!"

"That girl was the one that healed me. My broken arm's good as new!"

The palace was spreading the news of the princess's return through the capital. It sounded better to the citizens to have Selene raised by someone in the church, and her volunteering at the clinic was winning the public's favor.

Thinking about how it was weird that they were spreading news far and wide that she was back before even debuting her to the nobles, I visited the guild. I sold them herbs from the gathering spots I'd planted near the world trees in the Wasteland of Nothingness, along with potions made from those herbs, just like I had done back in Gald.

"Thank you so much. While the church's clinic operates at a bigger scale in the capital, I'm happy that we're getting high-quality potions at the guild too."

"I see, that's good then. I'm glad that my potions are of use."

Before, I'd been selling normal potions and mana potions, but I'd since learned the recipes for various status effect-healing potions and high-quality hi-potions and mana potions.

As I idly chatted with the receptionist, someone shouted at us.

"Ah! Chise?! And Teto?!"

When I turned around to see who it was, I saw a familiar elf girl pointing at Teto and I. “You’re...Raphilia, right?”

It was Raphilia, the archer from Dungeon City’s top party, the Swords of Daybreak. It had been over ten years since we’d last seen each other, but she didn’t look much different, aside from growing a little bit.

“It’s been so long! And you haven’t changed at all! Weren’t you supposed to be human?!”

“You’re looking a bit more like an adult, Raphilia.” I could remember the day we met like it was yesterday, but it seemed like her vibes had rounded out a little.

Teto, on the other hand...

“Hmm? Who are you?”

“You’re kidding! You’ve forgotten me?!”

“I was joking. Nice to see you again, Raphilia.”

The elf’s shoulders had drooped as she smiled bitterly at Teto’s joke, but her gaze immediately softened as she reminisced. “It feels so nostalgic. So much has happened since then.”

“Tell us all about it, Raphilia. We’ll treat you to a meal,” I said.

The three of us borrowed a corner of the guild’s bar to hear what she had to say. After we’d left Dungeon City, the Swords of Daybreak had used the sacred sword I’d made with Creation Magic to work at clearing the dungeon. With Arsus at A-rank already, plus the strength of the sacred sword, they’d made it to the deepest floor. After they did, they’d left the dungeon core where it lay so it could be used for training the next generation.

“Then Arsus and Lena got married and had kids. A cute boy and girl.”

“I see. Those two, huh...?” I remembered how good the pairing of a cool swordsman and a young witch looked as adventurers.

“Other than that—”

Their scout had left the party and joined another one. His total mana pool was average, and though he was past his physical prime, his experience as a scout for that long—along with his intuition—made up for his age. The priest of their party had originally been an orphan that Father Paulo had raised, and after quitting adventuring, he’d returned to the church to help the Father out.

“I see. And what happened to the kids?”

“They’re all doing great, but it’s been ten years so they aren’t kids anymore,” she said, miming out how tall Danny-boy was at a whole head above her as she laughed. On one hand, I was impressed at how much he’d grown, but on the other, my own lack of growth made me sad.

“So why are you in the capital, Raphilia?”

“I’m here for the A-rank exam. I’ve come to stay in the capital every summer for the exams ever since I became eligible. This is my third attempt,” she answered with a sigh. She’d been outstanding as a high-ranking adventurer before, but if even she failed the exam every time, then it was probably going to be harder than I’d expected.

It seemed that there would be sixteen adventurers taking the exam in Ischea this time around. Out of those, *maybe* two or three might get raised to A-rank, if any, depending on how the guild judged things. Apparently, another sixty or seventy people were eligible for the exam, but since everyone couldn’t take it at once, they took turns so that there wouldn’t be a dearth of fighting power on the field. That was why the exam happened twice a year. There were also a number of B-ranks who were fine where they were, or had already passed their prime as adventurers.

Raphilia explained all of this to us as our senior in the A-rank exam, before we took over and told her all about what had happened to us in the last eleven years. I fudged some details, but she happily nodded along as she listened to us go on about our life with Selene.

“You really love that adopted daughter of yours, huh?”

“Of course I do. She’s my precious baby.”

“And Selene is Teto’s precious little sister!”

When we answered so strongly, Raphilia smiled, troubled. “Ahh, I’m so jealous. It was all well and good that I flew out of my village to become an adventurer, but I haven’t met any other elves, and it’s hard for us to get pregnant already anyway. I’m jealous that you have a kid! I might head home after another ten or so years of adventuring...” she said leisurely.

Just what you’d expect from a long-lived race like an elf, I thought to myself before realizing I was somewhat the same, being unaging and all.

“Ah... It’s about time for my daughter to come back.”

“We’ve gotta go meet her!”

We’d ended up getting so caught up in chatting with Raphilia that quite a lot of time had passed.

“I see; you’ll need to get going then. We should talk again, if you get time.”

And so we said goodbye. Since she was in the capital for the exam, we ended up talking to her a number of times after that anyway. Sometimes, we even grouped into a temporary party with her to do some quests as we waited for the A-rank exam.

Chapter 24: Selene's Life between the Wasteland and the Palace

Selene's Side

Three months had passed since I'd begun commuting to the palace. Father had teachers come and educate me, giving me lessons fit for a royal. Though it was all a lot harder than what the nuns at the church had taught me, it was fun. And when I told mom, Teto, and the nuns at the clinic about all I was learning, I was happy to get their praise.

While I didn't see my father every time I went to the palace, we sometimes had tea and chatted.

"This is a painting of Elize that hangs in the palace."

"So this is mother..."

During our tea parties, father told me many things about my mother, Lady Elize. Looking up at her portrait, he told me about what flowers she liked, what they ate together, and how she and father had met. I told him about how fun and challenging my lessons were, how mom, Teto, and I spent my days off, how commoners lived, and things that had happened in Gald.

The gentle look in his eyes when he looked at me made the fact that he was my father feel real.

Another time, I received an invitation for tea from Her Majesty the Queen.

"Welcome! How lovely of you to join me. I'm so glad I'm able to see you, Seleneriel."

"It's wonderful to meet you, Your Majesty. Thank you ever so much for your invitation today."

After I gave her a clumsy, just-learned curtsy and bow, Queen Aria, father's first wife, gave me a happy smile. Seeing such a sweet, beautiful lady made me want to be just like her someday.

"You're my child as well, Seleneriel. I'd like for you to be a little bit more relaxed with me," she said, urging me to sit down and talk to her. "You introduced yourself as if we've never met, but I actually knew you as an infant."

"Huh?" The word slipped out of my lips unintentionally, and I rushed to slap a hand over my mouth.

Queen Aria just giggled in amusement before telling me about my

birth mother, Lady Elize.

“If not for Lady Elize, I wouldn’t even be here today.”

“What do you mean...?”

“I was in a dangerous place when I was delivering your oldest brother.”

The first prince’s delivery was a difficult one, and Queen Aria had apparently lost a lot of blood. But the Saintess Elize (as she was known at the time) came with the palace healers, working hard to deliver the baby, heal the mother, and do all of the aftercare.

“Back then, she used the most potent healing spells she knew to mend me, cheered me up, and celebrated my baby’s birth. I owe my life to her.”

“I see...”

“That’s why I was so happy when you were born too. I met you a bunch, and even held you. But after that... It was terrible.”

Queen Aria looked so happy as she told me about the past, but her gaze fell sadly at the same time. She must have been mourning my mother after she’d been attacked and killed by the devil cultists.

“Seleneriel? Or may I call you Selene?”

“Y-yes!”

“I’ve heard about your situation from His Majesty, and about the adventurers who raised you. Would you tell me about them too?”

“Y-yes! Of course!”

And so, Queen Aria and I had a number of tea parties together, where she told me about mother Elize, and I told her about mom and Teto. The more we had tea together, the more chances I had to meet my siblings. They all welcomed me warmly, even though I’d been missing and raised by an adventurer.

Most everyone in the royal family was warmhearted, but it also made me wonder. I’d been raised in Gald, where polygamy was accepted, so I wasn’t against the concept, but I knew monogamy was more common.

“Queen Aria, what did you think when mother and father’s other concubines married him?”

I thought she must have wanted him to only look at her, but she gave me a troubled smile.

“Hmm. When we were younger, Alberd was incredibly popular with the ladies, and I was a bit jealous as his fiancée. But...”

“...But?”

“Alberd... No, everyone in the royal family has a...lot of love. The former queen told me that I would have trouble if I was all alone.”

I tilted my head a little bit in confusion as her eyes seemed to look far away.

“So he married one of the other ladies who’d been in the running

for queen consort as a consort too. It was hard with just the two of us, but then Alberd was sent off to fight monsters as the crown prince.”

“Father told me about that. It was then that he met my mother, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, it was. He brought the Saintess Elize in as another of his concubines. We cried in joy when we found out that our burden would be lessened.”

She was speaking in euphemisms, so I didn’t quite understand. I just admired noblewomen’s sayings and decided to ask mom about it later.

“Ah, yeah. I guess it’s time to give you some sex ed, huh?” Mom had fussed, gazing into the distance.

After we’d had a number of tea parties together, Queen Aria had a request for me.

“Selene?”

“Yes? What is it, Your Majesty?”

“I would like it if you called me mother too, one day.”

She wasn’t forcing me to do it, just expressing her wish that I would eventually, but all I could do was give her a vague smile.

I was starting to think of father, Queen Aria, and my siblings as family who accepted me. But at the same time, I felt lonely. I was able to hear lots about mother Elize, but I still didn’t feel like she was my real mom. And every time I felt closer to father, the queen, and my siblings, it felt like I was drifting further and further away from mom and Teto.

Witch’s Side

One day in the summer, Selene, Teto and I set off to have a picnic. Things had been a bit hectic since Selene began going to the palace, and we’d finally found time to have the outing we’d promised her on her birthday.

“Mom, Teto, I’m so excited for the picnic!”

“I know. Let’s take it easy today.”

“I brought lots of toys with us!”

Passing through a teleportation gate to the center of the Wasteland of Nothingness, we emerged from the trees we’d planted to a spring that had a little field next to it. I held a basket filled with sandwiches that the three of us had made that morning, while Teto’s hands were full of all of the things she’d prepared to play with. Bubble liquid made from soap plants, a ball made of leather, a kite made with a thin wooden frame covered with fabric... It looked like she’d really been looking forward to the day.

“I’m gonna take tons of photos of the two of you today!”

Selene had brought the bear golems with her, along with the black-painted magical camera we'd given her for her birthday.

We spread out a blanket under the shade of the trees and put all of our stuff down.

"Selene! Let's play ball already!"

"Okay, I won't lose! Take pictures of us, okay?"

Teto took the ball from her pile of toys and started backing up while Selene handed her camera to one of the bear golems and asked them to take photos of their game of catch. The bear golem she asked gave her a thumbs-up, while the other ones either joined in on the game or stood a short distance away, dancing as they cheered everyone on.

"They really are enjoying it, huh?"

Their game of catch was pretty rough, with Teto and Selene both using Body Strengthening. She must not have had much chance for physical exercise in the palace, because Selene was throwing the ball with all her strength; like it was the one shot she was going to get to burn off all her pent-up stress, while Teto and the bear golems caught it. I smiled wryly, thinking it looked like dodgeball instead of catch.

"Ahh, that was so fun~! And it's so hot~!"

"Well, it is summer. Here, have some tea."

"Thank you, Lady Witch!"

Teto and Selene came back over, fanning themselves with their hands after they'd gotten too hot playing at full strength under the summer sun. I poured each of them a cold cup of tea and handed them over.

She'd probably never be able to look like this back at the palace, I thought to myself, and the three of us kept on enjoying our picnic.

We ate our sandwiches, searched for four-leaf clovers in the undergrowth, made flower crowns out of them, and used the bubble liquid Teto brought to blow bubbles high into the sky.

"Mom, Teto, Mr. Golem's gonna take a picture of us, so come closer!"

"Okay."

"Like this?"

Teto and I hugged Selene in between us as one of the bear golems snapped the shot, making a memory.

Lying in the shade, all tuckered out from playing, Selene asked me: "I want to watch the A-rank exams!"

"You do, huh...?"

The exam was in August, so it was soon.

"I asked father, and he said it would be okay if I got permission from you."

Selene had begun calling the king "father" and the late Lady Elize

“mother.” We hadn’t known her exact birthday before, but we’d learned that she was born in October, and her debut to the nobles would be held then on her twelfth birthday.

But back to business—

“Undercover? Hmm... You’d have guards with you, right?”

“Yep, I will.”

“Is Selene gonna come cheer us on? Teto will do her best!”

While it was a series of mock battles between high-ranking adventurers, it was still a competition to be raised to A-rank. And even though the other adventurers were high-ranked, that didn’t necessarily mean they were all on the up-and-up. I didn’t really want Selene to see people like that fighting, but...

“Hrm... Hah, fine. Okay.”

“Thank you, Mom! I’ll definitely cheer you on! I’m gonna go play some more!” Selene said, running off into the field with her bear golems.

“I really don’t want her to see us fighting rough, but... Whatever. Teto, let’s follow her.”

“Roger!”

Teto and I followed Selene to play our hearts out, and in the evening, Teto carried Selene on her back after she fell asleep from exhaustion, ending our day in the Wasteland.

We picked the best picture of the three of us that was taken today and put it in a frame, putting the others in an album.

As Selene’s life switching between the palace and the Wasteland of Nothingness continued, the day of our A-rank exam finally came.

Chapter 25: A-Rank Promotion Exam (First Half)

On the day of the A-rank exam, we left the house we'd gotten from the king and headed to the guild's training grounds, where the exam would take place. The grounds were set up like a circular coliseum, with spectator stands.

Inside the training grounds for the A-rank promotion exam were a total of sixteen B-rank adventurers from Ischea.

"So we've gotta hold out against these people, huh?"

"I can't wait to fight them all!"

Of the sixteen participants, ten had already tried the exam two or more times. The remaining were adventurers who'd only just become eligible to take it this year.

As it was a one-on-one elimination tournament, us back-line fighters like me and other support-type adventurers were at a disadvantage.

"The people who came to watch must be party members."

Though the exams weren't open to the public, they did seem to allow comrades to come see, so there were a few observers. Within the small crowd was Selene in her little nun outfit, surrounded by other nuns and some guard knights. She gave me a little wave.

"Lady Witch, it's Selenel!"

"Yes, we'll have to show her our good sides."

The capital's adventurer guild's guildmaster arrived. "I'm glad that we're able to have this promotion exam again. I hate long explanations, so I'll give the first timers a basic rundown of the rules."

The rules for the elimination tournament were as follows:

No killing. Any killing would get you disqualified instantly. They didn't want to lose any higher-ranked adventurers, after all.

You could do anything to win, so long as no one died. The guild would foot the healing bill.

If you were judged to be unable to continue fighting even after being healed, you'd be out, but your battles until then would be taken into consideration towards promotion.

The point of the exam wasn't to see who won the most fights, but who had the necessary qualities of an A-rank adventurer.

After the rules were explained, we immediately drew lots.

"...I'm number eight."

“Teto is number three!”

In the short window before the exam would begin, I checked out both of our status pages.

NAME: Chise (Reincarnator)

CLASS: Witch

TITLE: Goddess of the Pioneer Village, B-rank Adventurer, Black Saintess

LEVEL: 80

HP: 2,500/2,500

MP: 108,600/108,600

SKILLS: Staff Martial Arts Lv 4, Origin Magic Lv 9, Body Hardening Lv 1, Mixing Lv 5, Mana Regeneration Lv 8, Mana Control Lv 9, Mana Isolation Lv 7, various others...

UNIQUE SKILLS: Creation Magic, Unaging

NAME: Teto (Earthnoid)

CLASS: Guardian Swordsman

TITLE: Witch's Follower, B-rank Adventurer

GOLEM CORE MANA: 87,900/87,900

SKILLS: Swordsmanship Lv 8, Shield Proficiency Lv 4, Earth Magic Lv 8, Body Hardening Lv 3, Monstrous Strength Lv 5, Mana Regeneration Lv 4, Subordinate Strengthening Lv 4, Regeneration Lv 4, various others...

Though neither of us had leveled up in the past few years, our skills and mana pools should've been more than enough for A-rank adventurers. But you never knew what might happen during actual battles, so we couldn't let our guard down.

And so, the exam began, and adventurers number one and two stood in the center of the training grounds. The first challengers were both human warriors. One was on their first attempt at the exam, while the other was a rude, violent adventurer with a unique skill. First-timer number one was knocked out in an instant.

He hadn't been unskilled. It was just that his Body Strengthening couldn't stop a greatsword with Body Hardening and a physical buff-type unique skill behind it. He was sent flying a few dozen meters at their very first clash, and his arm broke. Battle over.

“That guy puts out a ton of damage. He's simply strong.”

“Teto will be going, then~!”

“Teto, be careful.”

Next up was number three: Teto.

Apparently the adventurer with the unique skill was Rock the Meat Cleaver, B-rank. He'd been disqualified from the last exam because he had killed his first opponent after being provoked. While it had been treated as an accident, his violent personality, quickness to pick fights, and the trouble he stirred up during quests, all led to his treatment as a very strong but delinquent adventurer. Why he was even allowed to take the A-rank exam, no one knew.

"Nice to meet you!"

"Psh, a brat, and a girl at that? They're screwing with me. I'll slaughter you in an instant!"

The battle began with him swinging his greatsword down boorishly and Teto catching it head-on. The dull sound of metal hitting metal rang through the grounds.

"Oooh, nice. That was really strong."

"Don't fuck with me! Go down already!"

He must have butchered strong monsters with the synergy of his outstanding muscles, body strengthening, and his unique skill. A normal adventurer taking a hit from him would have their hands go numb, be blown away from the shock, or have their arms or ribs broken. But Teto just lightly caught the greatsword with her magic sword.

"Yeah, they're just on radically different levels."

Rock's abilities gave him an instant of power by detonating his mana. But Teto's skill with Body Hardening covered her entire body with a massive amount of mana. Unable to get through her defenses even after throwing everything he had at her, the huge adventurer was nearly spent.

"Dammit, what the hell? Why didn't my attack do anything?"

"It was too light. A real attack is like...this!"

Teto slipped around his side with a well-paced movement, drawing her sword. Normally she would've cut him in two, but she used her Body Strengthening to surround her magic sword with mana, dampening the edge to use it as a blunt weapon. Rock took the hit and was knocked to the ground just like the adventurer he'd taken out before, losing consciousness.

"Lady Witch, I won~!" Teto waved to me before turning to wave at Selene in the stands too.

The other adventurers, having thought that Rock would sweep the exams, were shocked at how strong Teto was, having caught his attack and won against him. Selene was subtly cheering at Teto's win.

Adventurer number four, a dwarven mage, was next up against Teto as the winner. They tried to stay far away, hitting her with magic as they backstepped from their starting point. In response, Teto cut down every spell that came her way, closing in on her opponent

before pointing her sword at them.

“I-I yield.”

“I won again.”

The reason number three lost was probably because, as a back-line mage used to being protected, they hadn’t raised their defenses by putting up a barrier. That was exactly why back-line adventurers had a disadvantage in this exam. A-rank quests depended on an individual’s ability to survive compared to their party’s skill.

Challenger number five was Raphilia the elf.

“Teto! I’m different than I was last time!”

“Come on, Raphilia!”

As soon as the match started, Raphilia let loose a volley of Spirit Magic-enchanted arrows that attacked from different directions. While Teto was able to dodge, the arrows just changed direction again, seeking her out until they hit.

“Uurgh, these are a pain!”

“Next, I’ll shoot even more!”

Raphilia had fired more than thirty arrows. When they hit Teto, the air compressed around them exploded, sending her flying. They kept on hitting her in a chain combo, and after being blown into the colosseum’s inner wall—

“That hurt a little bit!”

“You’re kidding me! My special move that could take down a Land Dragon in one hit...”

It would’ve been dangerous for Teto back when we’d first met Raphilia, but since Teto now had Body Hardening raising her defense over her whole body, she was completely unharmed, if a little bit dirtier.

“...I yield. If that didn’t beat you, I have nothing else that could.”

“Got it. Winner, Teto the Adventurer!”

“Huh? It’s over already?” After a puzzled look, Teto used her Earth Magic to fix the wall she’d hit as she waited for her next opponent.

Raphilia withdrew so quickly to avoid spending too much of her stamina and mana fighting Teto, instead saving it for her second round.

Challenger number six was a scout. As soon as the bout began, he threw a bunch of knives, accelerating their speed with Wind Magic. When Teto knocked them out of the air, bags attached to their hilts opened, covering her with the powder inside.

“What is this? This smoke smells funny!”

“You breathed it in! That was quick-acting anesthetic, enough to paralyze a grown man!”

The scout’s mana pool was normal, and he was probably only able

to use weak Wind Magic. He must have clawed his way up to B-rank with Wind Magic combined with drugs, along with more Wind Magic assisting his movements, and high skill in Body Strengthening. He probably had the least talent out of all of the adventurers taking the exam, but his effort and ingenuity made me think he was the most dangerous out of all of them.

But—

“That won’t work on Teto.”

“Wh-What? ...Guh!”

He was up against the wrong opponent. Being a golem demon, drugs didn’t work on Teto.

The scout must have had his own anti-poison magic tool equipped, because he charged through the cloud of anesthetic to try to stab Teto with a dagger. But as soon as he got close, Teto grabbed his arm and used a halfhearted shoulder throw to slam him into the ground.

“I-I yield. You have Drug Resistance too? How the hell are you so strong?”

Teto was nearly unharmed, and had barely used any of her mana. This had everyone around us in a tizzy. Though they’d thought they caught everything she had up her sleeve from watching her at the training grounds earlier, she was exceeding their expectations.

Next up, adventurer number seven was a mage-type. Instead of attacking Teto, they tried to stop her movement with a cage of ice on all four of her sides before shooting a massive chunk of ice at it.

“This is the end!”

They tried their best to win against her, but Teto just squared up with her sword inside the cage.

“A-one and a-two and—”

With a slow cheer, Teto let the mana surrounding her sword fly. The dense mana blast cut through the ice cage and shattered the huge chunk. Lightly brushing the powdery flakes of ice off of her head as they fell, she walked up to the mage, who was in shock that their full-power attack had been blocked, and pointed her sword at them.

“This is the end.”

“I-I yield!”

“Next up is Lady Witch! I’m not gonna lose!”

Since it was an elimination tournament, I knew I’d end up against Teto. I really wasn’t looking forward to fighting her, but she’d solo sweep the whole thing at this rate, so I needed to do my best to get to A-rank too.

And...

“Mom, Teto, do your best...”

Selene was rooting for us. I couldn’t just lose to Teto and not show

my daughter my good side.

“I can’t disappoint Selene, so I’m gonna do this seriously.”

“Got it. Teto will be serious too!”

Squaring up with her magic sword, Teto let out all of the mana she’d been saving to try to overpower me. On my end, I compressed my massive mana to the limit, quietly covering the surface of my whole body with Body Strengthening.

“F-Fight—!”

Teto was coming at me at full speed, so I backstepped into the air with flight magic.

“I’ll go first. *Thunder Bolt!*”



It was the lightning spell I'd used against the Land Dragon. I'd improved it since then; one blast took 3,000 MP, the entire pool of an average adventurer. I shot ten of those off around the colosseum, frightening all of the adventurers there. Since my total mana was over 100,000 MP, it was an easy attack to do, but Teto just ran circles around them.

"It isn't fair that you ran into the sky. If you're doing that, then—"

Teto thrust a hand into the ground, tearing up a piece of it like clay. Then she compressed the ground in her hand into a clump of rock.

"Whoosh!"

"That's dangerous!"

She chucked the rock at me in the air, but if I dodged it wrong, it was likely to fly out of the colosseum. I tried to surround and stop it with a barrier, but the rock was covered in mana from her Body Hardening, making it as strong as a cannonball.

"*Multi-Barrier!*"

I used a multilayer barrier to try to stop it this time, but it kept breaking through them. Each layer cost 1,000 MP, and it broke through ten.

At this point, I only had 60,000 or so mana left. Teto, on the other hand, still had mana to spare.

"This is the end!"

She used the flying rock as a distraction, manipulating the ground to make footholds for herself to run up and get to me in the air. She made it over ten meters up to where I was, but—

"*Gravity!*"

Just as her sword was about to hit me, I used gravity magic to crush her to the ground, her sword penetrating so far into the dirt that she couldn't reach it.

"Gugigigih... Lady Witch, I can't move. I yield, Teto lost!"

Relieved that she'd given up, I let out a sigh as I stopped the spell.

Battling with magic was a test of who could make who burn more of their mana. You used mana to attack, and you lost mana when your defensive barriers were destroyed. The key was to either use an attack so strong they couldn't defend against it, or fight while gradually chipping away at their reserves.

"I really didn't want to fight you, though. I was so anxious."

"But if I hadn't given it my all, I wouldn't have been able to hit you."

Teto had used her Body Hardening and earth magic to efficiently eat through my mana. She'd taken half of my entire total pool to defeat, while she'd only used maybe 10,000 MP total before fighting

me. If she had used Body Hardening to resist the gravity magic and used a flying slash or something on me, she would have drained me even more, and won. But she probably also figured she should conserve mana for other battles. “Y-You?! Do you need healing?!”

“Lady Witch.”

“Okay, okay. *Hi-Heal!* (And a stealth *Charge* to restore some of your mana.)”

I used a real healing spell to mask the mana charge I gave Teto. With that, I had 40,000 MP left, but I’d have a bit of time between matches to down a mana potion or two, so that would top me up.

The people around us were dumbfounded by our extreme battle, getting even more of a shock when I healed her despite having more fights lined up.

Chapter 26: A-Rank Promotion Exam (Second Half)

After winning against Teto, I took the lead in the elimination tournament.

The mana potion I drank restored 3,000 MP, the average person's whole pool, but it was a single cast of *Thunder Bolt* for me.

And so, challenger number nine, a dwarven adventurer, came forward.

The lightning magic I'd used on Teto was something I'd devised at first to use against a Land Dragon, which would usually be taken down by a group. Even if the adventurers I was up against were here for the A-rank exam, a B-rank adventurer taking the spell solo wouldn't come out unscathed, so I decided to seal it away for the rest of the exam.

As I decided to just put a barrier on myself and watch how things played out, the adventurer came slashing at me.

"You must be underestimating me if you're not dodging a preemptive attack as a mage!"

"I'm really not, though."

My opponent was quite proficient with his Body Hardening, but I'd cast my barrier, still dwelling on how it'd help up against Teto. Even if it was a hit with the same Body Hardening, the high density and volume of mana behind my barrier stopped the attack easily.

He swung his axe and it stopped right in front of my eyes. Though the strength of my barrier caught him off guard, he still tried smacking away at it for a while. When it didn't show any signs of breaking, he tried putting some distance between us, but...

"Too slow. *Stone Wall, Earth Bind.*"

"Ghh, dammit... I yield."

I raised a wall of earth behind him as he backed off, and stretched an arm out of the wall to restrain him.

My *Thunder Bolt* had shown off my lethality. My defensive barrier showed my defensive approach, and my flight spell let me show off my skill at evasion. I'd shown off my healing magic with Teto, and this time, I demonstrated how I could make my opponent powerless and capture them. I'd been conscientiously turning my herbs and other materials over to the adventurers' guild, so that covered my collecting abilities.

As I thought about what else would be necessary for an A-rank adventurer, opponent number ten came up. They were the same as the other mages—packing a big mana pool, probably over 20,000 MP.

“Out of respect for your abilities, I will show you my killer technique!”

A storm of burning bullets came from all directions. I put a barrier around each one, crushing them inside. I’d done something similar years before, but since my Mana Control had improved since then, I was able to stop it all easily.

“—I yield.”

The eleventh challenger was a spear-wielding adventurer who used his Body Hardening to push himself to ludicrous speeds, and focused his power into the tip of his spear to try breaking through at a single point. When I tried to put up a multi-layer barrier to stop it, he surprised me by breaking through three layers, while he was shocked that I managed to block his attack at all.

He kept trying to do the same thing, but I suppressed his approach with a steady barrage of spells and put up obstacles to block his thrust. When my bullet-hell attacks had cornered him, I used my earth magic to restrain him.

The twelfth adventurer had brought a magic-sealing magic tool to use against other mages.

“This’ll shut you down!”

“You’ve got a rare tool, there.”

The principle behind magic sealing hinged on a sort of mana jamming. By corrupting a spell mid-cast with the appropriate wavelength of one’s own mana, the caster’s flow would be blocked. Beast-type monsters who laced their howls with mana produced a similar disturbing effect. But I had refined my control, assuming that somebody was going to be leaning on that tactic, so all it did was maybe slow my casting a bit. I actually could have just forced my spells through with my massive mana pool too.

But this time—

“I actually have a plan to counter these, you know!”

“Wh—? You aren’t a mage?!”

I closed in on him in an instant, smacking him with my staff. The seal he’d used was meant to block the mana expelled from a mage’s body in casting, and didn’t work on the mana *in* one’s body. Because of this, I could use Body Strengthening to fight in melee, although I wasn’t as good at it as Teto.

“I’m an adventurer, after all. I need to be able to handle some close-up fighting in self-defense!”

Using my small body to dodge his attacks, I hit him with my staff, fists, and some kicks.

By the way, the bindings used on prisoners with magical prowess and the like were mana-sucking tools. They would forcefully absorb mana from inside the prisoner's body to strengthen themselves, so the prisoner couldn't use magic or Body Strengthening, but the restraints would become harder to destroy too.

While I was thinking about that, I sparred with my opponent adventurer for about five minutes, finally closing in between his arms and hitting him in the abdomen with my staff, making him crumple to the ground.

"That should be enough for showing my melee skills."

I figured by now the remaining adventurers were perplexed about how to handle a magician who could hold her own in a bare-knuckle brawl.

"Lady Witch, you're amazing! You're so cool!"

I gave a wry smile as Teto cheered for me, puffing out her chest proudly.

"Mom really is amazing..."

Glancing over to Selene, who was happily watching me go, I was relieved to know that I was showing her my good side.

"B-Break! We request a little break!"

And so, adventurers thirteen through sixteen asked for a short recess before the next battle. Normally, it would have been me asking for one after multiple bouts back-to-back, but they were grouping up to concoct an impromptu battle plan. They figured if they could beat somebody as conspicuously strong as me, they'd be shoo-ins for A-rank in the second round.

After that, the four of them decided on roles to chip away at my mana through various methods, or break through my barrier, but they all ended in vain. But to their credit, they'd brought me down to 20,000 MP; no matter how much mana I had total, it was possible to run me dry through saturation attacks.

The second round of the battle began.

"Due to their wounds from their last battle, it seems that they've withdrawn their participation."

"I see..."

Adventurer number one's resignation ended the first battle of the round. Though the adventurers' guild had gotten a healer for their wounds, they'd been injured too severely for them to be much help. Which meant my next opponent was—

"Don't get cocky since you can use a bit of magic, brat!"

"I'm not getting cocky. And just so we're on the same page, I'm actually over twenty years old."

"There's no way a brat like you who's barely putting out any mana is strong!"

Adventurer number two, the delinquent, had been unconscious until just a moment before, and was taking his frustration out on me.

It was true that between micromanaging my massive mana pool to eliminate waste and my barrier, it was hard to sense my mana. But the fact that nobody could gauge my reserves was precisely why the rest of the competition so far had taken me so seriously. Even considering how he hadn't seen me fight after Teto knocked him out, he didn't seem to realize that he was exposing how bad he was at sensing mana by not being able to sense my reserves. It seemed he was quite sure about his strength...or rather, still convinced his unique skill made him top dog.

"It's a matter of competency. You bark a lot for someone who lost to Teto."

"Huh?! You're fucking with me too?! *ME*, Lord Rock, with my magic sword, the Meat Cleaver?!"

He was blasting out his mana in an attempt to intimidate me, but it didn't feel like anything but a light breeze. The Long Worm we'd fought in the dungeon was more menacing than him.

"Fine. I didn't move to A-rank last year after that guy pissed me off and I had to put him down, but I won't kill you this time! I'll just fuck you up so bad that you'll never be able to live normally again!"

"...You sure are vulgar."

He rushed at me, swinging his greatsword at my barrier. Excluding Teto, he had the most stable attack power of all of the adventurers I'd fought today. But since he didn't do as much instantaneous DPS as the lance, my barrier showed no signs of breaking.

He looks pretty sturdy. He'd probably get right back up if I held back.

As I internally debated how to defeat him, the massive adventurer seemed to assume that I was at my wit's end, and started taunting me.

"What's wrong?! Can't do shit?!"

I had the sudden idea to use his sturdiness to experiment.

"Hmm... Let's try this. *Freeze Water.*"

I cast a spell. All it did was summon a bunch of balls of water and shoot them at the guy.

"Hah, you think that widdle water magic is gonna work on me— brrr?!"

He swung his sword, popping the bubbles to splash them onto the ground, but the moment the water hit him, it froze.

"I just cast it to steal your body heat. How's it working?"

My projectiles were supercooled. Since they were made with magic, they stayed liquid until they hit, freezing in a second. The freezing water kept piling on, turning into a thick sheet of ice covering his body.

“Dammit!”

But I was up against a seasoned adventurer. He used Body Hardening to forcefully heat his muscles and melt the ice, but...

“Freeze.”

A simple breeze blew the moisture from the melting ice, chilling him more through evanescence. Then, I hit him with another volley, steadily lowering his body heat. His teeth started chattering and his sword-hand stiffened up, making it harder to hold his greatsword.

The people around us had varying opinions.

“Is it okay for her to fight like this? Doesn’t she have any pride as an adventurer, as a warrior?!”

“So this is how someone who’ll be A-rank fights? It’s unfathomable.”

“They say magic hinges on the breadth of one’s knowledge, but one minute she’s using grand lightning magic, and the next, she’s trifling with a B-rank adventurer using such low-tier magic. Terrifying.”

“She’s definitely getting promoted. She’s treating Rock like a child, and he’s got the essential attack power of an A-rank.”

As I listened to people talk about me, I encouraged the huge adventurer I was fighting to give up.

“Will you yield? At this rate, you’re gonna die.”

“What the...hell did you...do to me?! I have...magic resistance!”

“It’s just a physiological response. You can block magic attacks with skills, but you can’t block environmental changes.”

Sheer willpower kept him swinging his sword, but with his blood circulation lowered, his movements were dulled, and there was no strength behind him. Hypothermia could kill him, so I decided to stop it there and just crush his spirit.

“Yield.”

“Who...would do...?”

“I see... Let me say it again. *Yield!!!*”

I released the mana I’d been suppressing until then to intimidate him. Though I had a lot less than usual thanks to back-to-back battles against B-rank adventurers, I still had a court magician’s worth, and I poured it on as thick as I could stand.

Though there was a limit to how much mana one could put out at once, my mana was denser from my use of Body Hardening, and it evoked a primal fear in the man that made him tremble worse than the cold ever could have. Plus, since I could direct the effect, no one else felt it. The massive man’s eyes rolled back into his head as he fainted, his instincts choosing unconsciousness before he could yield from the terror.

“Ah... I might’ve overdone it. He needs immediate aid.”

I terminated my spells and warmed him up to normal temperature again, but he'd also suffered from some frostbite, so I sprinkled a potion on him.

It'd be nice if he understood the difference in our skill.

The A-rank exam then came back to me against Teto as adventurer number three, but—

“Teto's not fighting Lady Witch again. I yield.”

A very sloppy surrender.

Then I had my mock battles with adventurers four to seven (excluding Raphilia), but they mostly surrendered after seeing my battles up until then.

In the end, the only one who challenged me was Raphilia.

“Take this!”

She shot the same barrage of Spirit Magic-infused arrows at me that she had at Teto, piercing into my barrier. This time, she aimed at the one spot instead of striking from different angles, and I felt my barrier start cracking. Layer after layer broke; the attack was on the same level as Teto's Body Hardening-strengthened rock. From how much mana I'd burned in past battles, I knew that it would be tough to keep my barrier going, and—

“I don't have much mana left, so I withdraw.”

“Huh? Wait, I...I won? Wait, wait, Chise! Can't you just use mana from your mana crystals?!” Raphilia prodded me, having seen me supplement my lack of mana with mana crystals back when I'd used Creation Magic to make Arsus's sacred sword.

It was true, I could've used them, since the exam allowed tool usage, but...

“I'm just tired. Also actually shocked at how many of my barriers you blew through.”

Up until then, not a single being other than Teto had put a dent in my defense, but today both Raphilia and the lancer adventurer pulled it off. The mental shock drained my motivation.

I was also just exhausted from using so much mana. Though I was always expelling everything I had to fill the Wasteland of Nothingness even a little bit more, the sensation when actually using magic was different, and I wanted to rest.

And so, Raphilia kept on fighting, and Teto and my attempt at the A-rank promotion exam in Ischea ended.

Chapter 27: A Secret Guard Job

Once the A-rank exam was finished, a short period of judging began.

The battle between Raphilia and the lancer, with her flashy magic versus his spear skills, was extremely impressive. Teto and I fought in a very simple, dispassionate way, as if we were working, so in that sense their battle seemed much more like one between high-ranked adventurers.

With adventurers one and two unable to continue, Raphilia put up a good fight against the adventurers in round two, beating seven of them. After that, the others kept fighting, but most got their streaks broken by Teto, and before we knew it, the exam was finished in a single day.

Selene had already left, but the knights left at the guild could tell her the results later.

And so, around sunset, the results were announced.

“From this exam, the ones who will be promoted to A-rank are Chise, Teto...”

From how many battles we’d won, that was reasonable.

There was one more.

“...and Raphilia.”

“Wha, you’re kidding me! But I lost to Teto, and I only won against Chise because she gave me the win!”

It was true that Teto had won against her, and that despite being able to block her special attack, I’d given up because of how much mana I’d spent.

“We’ve seen your growth over these past few years, and your guts to challenge Miss Chise along with your instantaneous talents brought us to conclude that you could make it as A-rank. If you are able to find good companions, you will overcome any difficulty.”

“...Understood. I will devote myself to it, as Chise and Teto have.”

Raphilia bowed deeply, seeming to consider her promotion to A-rank as a grand achievement. Her aim was to have the true strength of an A-rank. But in my opinion, that Spirit Magic-enchanted fusillade of arrows would’ve been more than enough to take on the five-headed hydra that I fought before, and it had been somewhere near A-rank.

“Okay then. Let’s get home.”

“Roger!”

After getting our guild cards updated, Teto and I did some shopping before returning to the Wasteland of Nothingness via teleportation gate. Selene was there waiting there for us.

“Mom, Teto, congratulations on becoming A-rank!”

“Selene, we’re home. We worked hard.”

“We’re home~!”

Selene, who’d come back earlier, congratulated us on our promotion, and some other guests had come to our house as well.

“The king? And the prime minister and knight commander too...”

“Father said that they needed to talk to you.”

“I see...”

Wondering what it was they wanted, I urged them to sit, and sat across from them.

“Firstly, let me congratulate you on your promotion to A-rank. They’re a class of valuable, talented people, with less than fifty total in our kingdom.”

“I’m not sure whether I should take that as many or few.”

Even if there were fifty, only about half of those were still working as adventurers. Apparently the others went on to other business, like working at the guild after graduating, or being scouted for another kingdom’s fighting force. Furthermore, being skilled enough to be A-rank was only one measure of strength.

“Some of the knights and court magicians are strong enough to rival A-rank adventurers, one of them being Ischea’s knight commander, Roland.”

Thinking of it like that, the royal palace, where most of Ischea’s strongest were concentrated, would have somewhere from ten to twenty.

“So, what do you need from us fresh A-ranks?”

“I’ll get straight to the point. Will you serve me?”

A-rank adventurers could be weighed favorably against a country’s military strength, so it wasn’t a surprise that they’d try to scout us.

“We’ll decline. I don’t have any loyalty to the royal family.”

The prime minister and knight commander both looked troubled at my tactless refusal, but the king smiled, seemingly pleased with my frank answer.

“Aha ha, I was right. Vaier, Roland, you’ve lost.”

“Yes, it is just as you say, Your Majesty.”

Apparently the three of them had committed to a wager on my answer.

“You came all this way just for that?”

“It’s not ‘just.’ For the country’s sake, I’m obliged to try at least once to negotiate for new talent. But this wasn’t our main objective

today.”

After a moment’s pause, the king looked straight at me.

“I’d like for the two of you to accompany Selene to the royal tomb as guards. I’d also like for you to covertly guard her in noble society, including her debut.”

My eyes widened in shock at his words before I quietly asked, “What happened?”

“The truth is that the remnants of the devil cult have begun to stir.”

“...Those are the people who attacked Selene’s mom.”

The devil cultists were a secret society that surrendered their bodies to devils in exchange for monstrous strength. I’d heard that they’d been wiped out already at the king’s command, but...

“It was my will to expunge them from the world, but a portion went into hiding and are targeting Selene once again. Their aim is to summon a great devil and claim their retribution against me in one fell swoop.”

“...Mom.”

Selene gripped my robe worriedly, and I covered her hand with mine to comfort her. “It’s okay. You have nothing to worry about, Selene. I’ll definitely protect you.”

“Teto will protect you as your big sister too!”

Teto and I soothed her, easing her worries a bit.

“And we get the side benefit of seeing you all dressed up.”

“Aww, mom...” We smiled as Selene pouted, and the king gave us a jealous look.

“Ahem... So you accept. I’ll have invitations to high society sent to the two of you as the adventurers who taught mixology and papermaking to the church for the sake of our nation’s orphans. And as A-rank adventurers, you more than qualify.”

Clearing his throat, the king told us about how we would be invited. I didn’t like how we’d be put on display, but it was necessary so we could protect Selene. Plus, the Cardinal had already laid the groundwork on the church’s side.

But though I was Selene’s mother, I was also an adventurer.

“And what will we be paid for guarding Selene?”

He was making a request of A-rank adventurers, so we couldn’t work for nothing.

“We will pay you ten large gold, with more depending on the results. We will also fulfill the contract we spoke of before.”

It was appropriate payment for an A-rank guard quest. Though we would be guarding her both to the royal tomb and in high society, the tomb part was more out of consideration for Selene and our circumstances, while partying was the real job. And once Selene’s

debut as a royal was safely finished, they'd acknowledge my ownership of the Wasteland of Nothingness.

With the king's request for us to guard her finished, Selene was thrilled that we would be able to stay with her as guards.

"I'm so excited to see you and Teto in dresses, mom!"

"Ahh, yeah... We're gonna have to figure out the dress thing."

I realized that there were a ton of things we'd need to do to prepare for participating in Selene's debut into noble society. First of all, I wouldn't be able to bring my usual witch's hat, black robe, and staff to a party. That meant I'd need to get clothes appropriate for high society.

"What to do...?"

"You're cute in anything, Lady Witch!"

"You're gonna have to wear a dress too, Teto."

Teto usually wore leather armor, so we'd need to have a dress prepared for her too. In terms of manners, the former noble nuns had slapped the very bare minimum into us back when we were staying at the capital's church. Teto and I would probably be fine as long as we kept our mouths shut, but hopefully people would be a little bit lenient with adventurers.

"As our knights will be protecting Selene on a day-to-day basis, we'll have the two of you stay in the palace as guests. During your stay, I'll have seamstresses sent to prepare your dresses."

And of course, the costs of the dresses and etiquette lessons would be covered as necessary quest expenses.

Thankful to the king for his consideration, I reflected on the day after he and his men had left.

"And I need to make use of the things I realized from the exam..."

I had come to the realization that even though my mana pool had ground my aging to a halt, there was a chance that I wouldn't be able to handle using it all in one defensive move, leaving me open to anything that made it through, or that I would use more mana than I expected.

"I'll need to make some accessories with high capacity mana crystals that I can still bring into a party..."

As I thought back on my day, I celebrated the fact that we'd be able to freely stay by Selene's side as her guards with her and Teto.

B-Rank Adventurer Rock the Meat Cleaver's Side

"Ah, dammit! I'm so pissed!"

The adventurer known as Rock the Meat Cleaver was in a bar, slamming back strong liquor as he cursed. The objects of his contempt were the two female adventurers he'd fought during the A-rank

promotion exam.

One of the adventurers was a stupid-looking woman named Teto. He'd thought he could beat her easily, but they'd been evenly matched... No, he'd been completely overpowered. Having originally made it to B-rank by a combination of his unique skill and Body Hardening instead of any proper training, he had no idea why he'd lost, and was drowning his sorrows.

The next one he'd fought was a childlike mage—one who'd coolly blocked his attacks with a barrier before bringing him to his knees with water and wind magic that even a D-rank could manage. Since Rock couldn't so much as *spell* "hypothermia," he was convinced she'd resorted to dirty tricks—possibly even a curse—knocking him out before he knew it and bringing the exam to an end. Because of that, he'd failed this year's exam too, and been laughed at for being all show, losing to girls so young.

"Ahh, I'm pissed and itchy. Dammit! Booze! Gimme booze!"

The frostbite from Chise's magic had taken a toll on his skin, and he compulsively scratched off the discolored patches, drowning further in his drink. The bartender reluctantly brought out more liquor, since he wouldn't stand a chance if a B-rank adventurer got violent, whether or not he was drinking himself dumb.

"Oh my, you seem to be in quite a bad temper, Mister Rock the Meat Cleaver."

"Hah? I'm in a bad mood right now. Don't talk to me, gramps."

Taking a glance at the man in gentleman's clothing with a shady smile on his face, Rock slammed back another cup of booze. But the gentleman kept smiling and talking to him.

"I have a request for you. Won't you please take it?"

"Don't feel like it right now."

"Now, now, don't be like that—"

"Shut up! I'll kill you!"

Rock threw a punch before the man could finish talking, but the thin gentleman's fishy smile didn't fade as he lightly caught it.

"Wha?!"

"What a wonderful fist you have. But you still lost."

"Tch, what the hell are you trying to say? Who are you?!"

"Don't you want power? An overwhelming amount, to make the girls who made a fool of you kneel before you..."

The creepy, sticky grin on the gentleman had spooked the bartender away, but it had a strange appeal to Rock.

"If you accept my request, you'll get what you want: overwhelming power, and an opportunity for revenge."

"Sounds interesting. Tell me more."

And so, the gentleman with the sketchy smile took Rock and

disappeared into the darkness of night.

Chapter 28: Visiting the Royal Tomb

Having accepted the quest to secretly guard Selene, Teto and I were invited to the palace as guests. A designer had been called in to discuss clothing and accessories with us, but...

“I thought I could pick out dresses with you and Teto, mom...”

“You’re the star of the evening after all, Selene.”

Since it was weird in general for mere adventurers to pick out dresses with a princess like Selene, we had to do it separately, and the queen consort and other female royals would be helping her choose her dress.

“Selene, won’t you have fun choosing a dress with Her Majesty?”

“I will. Queen Aria and my older siblings are treating me really well too.”

Selene’s internal family dynamics were in the process of changing, and though it might have mostly confused her, it seemed like both sides were gradually stepping up.

“We might not be able to pick dresses together, but I’m looking forward to seeing you on the day of your debut.”

“I can’t wait to see you all dressed up, Selene!”

“Okay! I’m gonna try my best to pick a dress!”

Saying that, our stealthy tea party with Selene ended, and we met with the designer to have our dresses made.



“You’re cute, Lady Witch.”

“And you’re beautiful, Teto.”

I was in a pale green dress with a low-key design. All of my accessories were silver, to go with my long, black hair. Teto, on the other hand, was wearing a deep blue dress that went with her tan skin. Her baby face made her look somewhat childish, but the mature color and sleeveless design drew your gaze. We’d also had golden accessories bought in advance, to go with her skin color.

“Okay, it’s time. *Enchant!*”

I used Enchantment Magic to put various magical effects on our dresses and accessories. My dress got a defensive buff, and I changed the stones in my accessories to high-capacity mana crystals. I made Teto’s dress bladeproof, and added spatial magic to her bracelets to make them like small magic bags. Unlike the bags we usually used, they didn’t have much space inside them, and time passed just as fast as it did outside, but it would let us pull my staff and her sword out whenever we needed them.

Enchanting both of our fancy dresses took 500,000 MP.

Once our preparations for the debut party were more or less finished, we made the trip to the royal tomb alongside the king on the anniversary of the death of Selene’s mother, the Saintess Elize, as we’d previously planned.

“I’m counting on all of you today.”

The solemn king rode in the front carriage, with Teto and me in Selene’s carriage as guards, all of us surrounded by guard knights on horseback. The carriages began moving, heading to the royal tomb on the outskirts of the capital.

“So we’re going to mother Elize’s grave now,” murmured Selene, staring at the scenery from the carriage window.

After about an hour of travel, our carriage followed a road through the woods to an incredibly clean graveyard. The lawn was tidily trimmed, and lined with the graves of high-status people.

We got out of our carriage when it stopped, feeling the mysterious vibe and pure ambience as we looked around.

Selene and the king accepted bouquets from their attendants before turning back.

“You all will stay here. From this point on, Selene and I will quietly visit the grave with Chise and Teto.”

“But, Your Majesty...”

“It wouldn’t be fair to our ancestors sleeping here for us to make a fuss. And the atmosphere is so pure, there’s no chance that the damned devil-possessed will be able to enter.”

“Understood. If anything happens, we will rush in immediately.”

The king nodded in assent in the knight's words.

It seemed that the guard knights with us had already been briefed on Selene and our situation, because they backed down easily.

"Father... Are all of these graves for royals?"

"No, the ones in the front are the graves of nobles who live in the capital. The graves of the royal family are a bit farther in. That's where your mother is resting."

"That's where my mom... No, mother is..."

As Selene corrected herself, not being used to speaking that way, the king gave her a loving gaze.

"No one else is here. Speak in a way that's easy for you."

Selene nodded, gripping the bouquet in her hands tightly. The king, also holding a bouquet, walked on while escorting her, Teto and I following behind.

"Lady Witch, this is a really pretty place."

"It is. It probably has purification magic going constantly."

The bodies and emotions of the dead were easily joined to stagnant mana, creating undead monsters and curses. In order to stop that from happening, priests calmed souls, regularly using purification magic to cleanse stagnation and corruption. Plus, the devil-possessed and those who used forbidden arts who might try to grave rob parts of dead bodies would instinctively avoid a place as pure as this.

"Selene, this way."

"Yes."

As I watched Selene from behind as she walked alongside the king, she had already passed me in height. Just a short time earlier, we'd looked like siblings, but the coming moment where our physical ages looked reversed made me both happy at her growth and sad that I couldn't change too.

The king led us to a long, sarcophagus-like grave. Judging by how Selene's mother's name was engraved on it, she must have been sleeping underneath.

"Mom is here..."

"The devil cultists had been targeting Elize's corpse to use as a vessel, so it was cremated to avoid that. If she'd been alive, Elize would have complained that the grave was too nice for her."

As the king laughed at himself, Teto, Selene, and I read the mood and stayed quiet.

"Elize. The weather is nice today. Your daughter Selene and the two you entrusted her to have come to visit."

"Hello, Mom. The weather is nice."

The king set down his bouquet in front of the grave, and Selene mimicked him, and they spoke to the grave.

"Elize, you might know this, since Selene had a lock of your hair,

but she's gotten so big."

"Mom, today, I came with my other mom, Chise, and Teto. And..."

In front of the grave of her birth mother, who'd died when she was incredibly young, Selene talked brightly about Teto and I, and her life in the Wasteland of Nothingness. Lady Elize's grave stood silent, accepting her words.

After talking for a while, Selene suddenly went silent.

"What's wrong, Selene?" I asked her from behind, only for her to turn around, crying with a troubled look on her face.

"I really am a bad girl..."

"You're a good girl, Selene. Why do you think you're bad?"

"Yeah. You're not a bad girl, Selene!"

Selene shook her head side to side as she cried. "But...I'm in front of mom's grave, and it still doesn't click."

No matter what she heard from other people about Lady Elize, or what she saw in paintings of her, or how long she looked at the lock of her hair and the ring she'd left her, it seemed that Selene didn't really feel like she was her mother.

She whispered, lonely, "I wish I could've talked with her, just once."

"...Yes. I wish I could meet Elize and speak with her again too."

As the king murmured his agreement with her, I took a step towards the grave.

"Selene. Do you want to meet your real mother?"

"Huh?"

"I can't bring the dead back to life, but I can let you talk with her for a little bit."

I pulled a ghost crystal magic tool and the lock of Selene's mother's hair from my magic bag.

"What are you doing? And what is that?"

"It's a spirit vestige crystal, a tool that allows for communication with the dead. This will let you talk with Selene's mother for a short time."

"Is something like that possible...? No, where in the world did you find something so convenient...?"

"It's something I found in the Wasteland of Nothingness, just like the teleportation gates."

Really, I'd made it with Creation Magic, but the king accepted my explanation, albeit with a doubtful look in his eyes at how convenient it was. I'd made it quite a long time ago, thinking that a day would eventually come when Selene wanted to speak to her birth mom.

Although I said they would be speaking with the dead, it was more accurate to say that the tool would collect mana from her corpse and lock of hair to temporarily project the person's appearance before

death.

"There wasn't enough mana left in the hair to use it as the only catalyst, but us being at her grave might let us talk to her."

"I want to meet her! Meet her and ask her something!"

"...I'd like to say something I was unable to tell her too. Can I count on you?"

"Yep, leave it to me."

Selene and the king let me take their spot in front of the grave, and I set the spirit vestige crystal on the ground, with the lock of hair in front of it.

"Vestiges of the saintess left here, collect under the spirit crystal now and take a temporary form—*Calling!*"

Chanting the spell to activate the tool, I poured mana into the crystal. The amount of mana inside of it would have an effect on how long the spirit could take form, so I put as much in it as I could bear.

The crystal shone white, sucking deep green mana from the grave and lock of hair and summoning the ghost of Selene's mother.

"Nn... This is... I died, right?"

Regaining consciousness on the top of the grave, Selene's mother looked at her translucent body, then at us in front of her, tilting her head in confusion. I backed up, and the king took my place.

"Elize... Elize!"

Her form dropped a little bit, and the king tried to hug her, only to slip through her body.

"Lord Alberd? It seems I died before you. I'm sorry," she apologized sadly.

The king fought back tears. "Don't apologize. You should be cursing me for not protecting you!"

"I wouldn't do that, I love you. Where is Selene? What happened to my precious baby?"

Understanding that she'd been brought back in spirit form and slowly gathering her memories from when she was alive, Elize searched for Selene. When she saw a little girl whose hair color matched hers, her eyes widened.

"Mo...m...?"

"...Selene? Seleneriel? Ahh, you've gotten so big!"

Selene had been a baby when Elize died, and now that Elize woke as a spirit, Selene was an eleven-year-old girl. When she realized Selene was her daughter, Elize reached out for her, but her hand passed through her just like it had passed through the king.

"Selene, I'm so glad you're safe. My precious Selene..."

"Chise and Teto there raised and protected her."

"Thank you for keeping her safe, and letting me see her grown just once."

Though Selene's mother knew she couldn't touch her, she still wrapped her arms around her as if she was hugging her, making motions like patting her head. When the king introduced us, Lady Elize's spirit gave us a happy look.

"But it's strange. You look exactly the same as you did when I passed and left Selene to you, but Selene is bigger, and Lord Alberd looks austere and wonderful. It's like I'm seeing a dream."

In reality, Selene's mother's spirit was like a fleeting dream. She was being maintained by the mana I'd poured into the crystal, but since it had been more than ten years since her death, she couldn't hang on long.

"Mom?! Your body is...!"

"Oh my."

There was probably a ton they wanted to talk about now that they'd been reunited, but Lady Elize's spirit, brought back by the magic tool, didn't have enough time to talk.

"Selene, you've grown so much. It seems I must go back to the side of Lorie, Goddess of the Underworld, soon."

"No! I want to talk with you more!"

Selene's mother gave her a loving gaze as she begged her.

"Thank you. But I'm not of this world any longer. I need to go. Queen Aria will surely get along with you. Lord Alberd, please take care of Selene with your other wives."

"Yes, I will! Aria and my two other wives, and my other children are all taking care of Selene!"

The king gave a bright smile as tears rolled down his face, which made Selene's mother laugh. Selene used that laugh to see her off with a smile.

"Mom! A bit ago, I picked out a gown for my debut with Queen Aria! I wanted to show you!"

"Ahh, I wanted to see you in a gown too. And it seems you married another person after I passed, Lord Alberd. You just have so much love, don't you?"

And finally—

"Selene, Lord Alberd—I love you. I always have. And I always will..."



Selene's mother's spirit disappeared into the air, the remnants of her mana spreading and blowing away with the wind. As the grave site regained its silence, Selene straightened her back, looking into the sky, while the king quietly cried.

"...I'm sorry I could only call her for a while, Selene. I wanted to let you talk to her more."

"Teto wanted to tell her lots about Selene."

Tito and I hugged Selene from behind, but she just smiled and shook her head.

"No, I got to hear what I wanted to ask her. It's okay."

What Selene had wanted to hear—the last thing her mother had said, was filled with more love than thousands of words, filling her and the king's hearts.

After wiping his tears away and regaining his composure, the king took us back to where the guards were waiting with the carriages. Their backs looked as if they were twice the size they'd been before we visited the grave.

And so, Selene's visit to her mother's grave ended.

Chapter 29: Princess Seleneriel's Debut

During our wait until Selene's debut party, the king arranged to let me frequent the palace's library, while Teto participated in the palace knights' training drills. There, she did some advanced demonstrations with Roland, the knight commander who'd been with the king, which led the other knights to recognizing her superiority.

For my part, I spent my time in the palace library discussing magic with an elderly court magician. It was a bit embarrassing having him bring tea and sweets, treating me like his grandchild, but it was fun hearing about his experiences as a court magician with a high mana pool who'd lived a long life.

"Devils are a type of mana life-form, just like spirits."

"Oh, I see. Spirits manifest the power of the thing that they govern over, but what do devils govern over?"

"An infinite variety of things. If spirits are born from the mana in nature, then devils are fundamentally born from the world of man."

It was said that collections of people's virtuous feelings or the souls of those who were loved by the gods became heroic spirits or angels after death. On the other side, the souls of evil people and collections of negative feelings became devils.

"That's about the gist of it, though someone who specializes in the field would tell you it is more complicated. The devil-possessed are humans housing devils within their bodies."

"Why is devil possession considered a forbidden art, then? If they both involve the use of mana-based life-forms, then what makes it different from spirit magic?"

"The root of them is different. Humans housing devils in their bodies add the devil's mana to their own, making them drastically stronger than they were before. But the devil's evil will erodes the human's own, twisting it until the devil's will takes over completely."

At the beginning, the user would gain a portion of the devil's mana while keeping their consciousness, but the devil would then tempt them into desiring even more devil mana, which would then swallow the human's will.

In comparison, spirit magic was used by offering your mana to the spirit to bring about phenomena, and while you could gain strength by allowing yourself to be possessed by the spirit, its core would

remain in the element that it governed, so you could cancel it at your discretion.

“As devils come from the hearts of man, it is easy for them to root themselves there. From there, the devil’s mana will eat away at the human, whose mind will cease to be their own and their mortal flesh will be bent into new shapes. Thus does a devil become a demon.”

“I see... I’ve learned a lot.”

Teto was a new race born from a golem merging with a spirit who’d lost its sense of self, so she was sort of demon-adjacent.

The court mage’s stories were more from a researcher’s perspective than that of a hands-on mage, which was extremely interesting.

“I’m happy that a geezer over one hundred and fifty like me still gets to talk to a youngin’ like you. Here, have some candy.”

“Thank you. You’ve lived a long time, huh?”

“Too long. I would’ve liked to go somewhere around fifty or sixty,” the elderly court magician laughed.

Though medicine in this world relied on healing magic and potions, the average life expectancy was still around fifty years old. People who had more mana would live longer, to around seventy. Other people who’d actively used mana, like mages or adventurers, would live somewhere from eighty to a hundred years old, barring accident or injury.

I got to hear about research regarding the link between mana and life expectancy too.

“Truthfully, my research has led me to the conclusion that human life expectancy can be lengthened in two ways.”

“Two ways?”

“Yes. The first lengthens it by keeping a person in their prime for longer. The second stops aging when the person reaches a certain total mana.”

The more mana you had, the longer you’d live, but Selene was in the former group, since she was still growing, and I was probably in the latter, since I’d stopped completely.

So I asked, “Why do some people stop aging?”

“That, I don’t know. Most humans go the way of the former; only an incredibly small number are in the latter group. It is said that the humans made by the gods in the original world would cease to age by default—high elves and elder dwarves, for example, compared against the latter generations.”

When I asked about humans, beastmen, or dragonmen, he explained forlornly that their own warlike histories had cut the lives of their specimens with the potential to stop aging short or driven such cases into hiding.

“Those who stopped aging were sometimes worshiped and called sages, while other times they were called witches and persecuted. Some of those people might have been confused with the devil-possessed.”

“I see...”

“I subscribe to the theory that while the factor for long life is within everyone, the capacity to cease aging has been passed on uninterrupted from the original world, and is held by a rare few.”

“Thank you for telling me such wonderful stories.”

“Ho ho, you’re welcome, miss.”

Humans created by gods—I was probably similar to the original humans, since I’d been reincarnated by the goddess Liriel. I was, beyond a doubt, stuck as a little girl for eternity, but I could probably deal with that.

I spent my days listening to Grandpa Court Magician’s interesting magic lectures until the day of the party came—

“Lady Witch~! There’s food over there! It looks yummy!”

“You can go eat, Teto.”

At the debut party, I didn’t know how to ballroom dance, so I stood near the buffet tables by the wall and waited for things to begin. I smiled bitterly as other guests scowled at Teto, watching her pile a mountain of food on a plate and chow down, but I made sure not to let my guard slip.

While I waited for the party to begin, I felt eyes on me.

What? Do I look weird?

I shot a look down at myself to check, but I didn’t see anything odd. I chose the dress from a tailor used to servicing nobles, and while I’d enchanted it with various effects, it was supposed to be a subdued, harmless, and inoffensive design. I had no idea why I’d attract any attention.

“I can’t really do anything about people staring. I need to stay vigilant.”

Since there was a chance the devil cult would attack, I sharpened my senses, but I noticed a trend in the palace hall.

“Huh, a lot of these people have big mana pools.”

It was probably a pedigree thing. The most martially distinguished folks were also inevitably skilled in Body Strengthening and magic, so they had lots of mana to sustain it. Compared to commoners, their detectable mana pools seemed higher. They probably either had lots of mana from birth, or were trained in magic to the highest degree their status permitted.

But within the crowd, I saw one person who seemed unnatural.

My eyes stopped on a sickly looking man in an ensemble that was nice even for the refined company he was keeping. Within the sea of

nobles with relatively high mana pools, his was small... No, near imperceptible. He didn't seem like he was a mage hiding it with a high Mana Control skill either, instead concealing it with a magic golden bracelet on his right wrist.

There was a chance that he had some sort of unique skill, and had either hid or suppressed his mana so that it wouldn't go berserk, but I couldn't remember anyone like that in the profiles of the attendees that the king had shown me.

Which meant he was suspicious.

As I tried to tell a nearby servant to contact the king, a boy spoke to me.

"N-Nice to meet you! I'm Count Flamea's second son, Oland. Which family do you come from? I've never seen you before. Are you a debutante?"

His spray-and-pray approach to small talk bewildered me. It seemed that since I looked like a twelve-year-old girl, I'd been mistaken for a noble's daughter. Looking around, I noticed a lot of children around Selene's age, probably all in the running for a future fiancé or friends.

Having been mistaken like that—

"I am Chise, from the Church of the Five Great Goddesses. Unfortunately, I don't have a family name."

"The church... I see."

That was a precooked line the cardinal had told me to use if anybody grilled me during the party. Saying I was with the church implied that I'd thrown away my family name by joining it. But sisters in the church could return to their families or refer to themselves by their family name if necessary, so it was just a lingering relic of the past.

"But you have such beautiful hair and eyes. They're gorgeous, like obsidian."

"Really? You're a smooth talker."

It was probably a stock phrase for socializing. I'd never had my hair or eyes complimented before, since I usually had a witch's hat pulled down over them, so it made me smile a bit bashfully.

Though I felt a little sorry for the boy, I wanted to go report the suspicious nobleman.

The boy looked a bit dejected that I thought he was just being nice, but he rallied himself and started talking again.

"How about we go have a chat over there?"

"I'm sorry, but I'll have to decline. Please, don't worry about me."

"Oh, don't say that. It would be a shame for you to stay a wallflower."

When he tried to lead me away, I felt a faint trace of mana

pressure from beside me.

“What are you doing?”

Teto, with a smile on her face and a plate piled with food, was using a touch of intimidation on the boy.

“Pl-Please excuse me!”

After being glared at by someone older than him, the boy panicked and moved away.

“Thank you, Teto.”

Her coming back over to me had lessened the gazes from the young boys and girls in the crowd.

“Mrgh...”

“What’s wrong, Teto? Is the food not good?”

“It’s delicious. But a lot of people are giving you weird looks, Lady Witch.”

“Weird?”

I hadn’t worried much about my appearance, but I’d caught the attention of young boys. I felt a little sorry that the pure little guys were, in turn, catching so much heat from Teto.

“You need to be more self-aware that you’re cute and lovely, Lady Witch.”

“Really? Wouldn’t that just describe you, Teto?”

Teto coming over had stopped the children’s stares, but now we were getting steamy looks from noblemen around her age. With her rare, healthy tan skin, beautiful baby face, and massive breasts, she was getting a ton of passionate gazes her way.

But since she didn’t really seem to realize she was gorgeous, she just tilted her head, flummoxed.

The noble boy had delayed me, but I needed to go warn the servant in charge of contacting the king about the suspicious man and what he looked like. But the man had already vanished.

“Thank you for your help. We will search for him immediately.”

A number of servants who dealt with communications began moving around in a panic, while I kept watch on the party floor and waited for things to begin.

“His Majesty the King and Her Highness Princess Seleneriel have arrived!”

Selene, the star of today’s show, had finally come. She’d always snuggled up to us back in our home in the Wasteland, but her education at the palace had taught her to keep her back straight. She had a beautiful dress on, and carried herself with a smile on her face.



It moved me to near tears seeing the girl I'd raised from infancy grow up to be taller than me now.

"Tonight is a wonderful night. My once-missing daughter, Selene, has come back home! After escaping a tragic incident, she was entrusted to an outstanding saintess of the church, and raised under her protection! Let us all drink and be merry in celebration of her homecoming!"

"Cheers!"

As the king raised a toast, the party began. Selene greeted everyone who attended beside him, a smile on her face.

"She's really grown into a wonderful girl to be proud of."

"She has. But it looks like it'll be rough. She won't even get a chance to eat all this delicious food."

I smiled wryly as Teto kept feasting off of the mountain of party food on her plate.

And so, after Selene had been greeted by many nobles and gotten most of them out of the way, it happened.

Chapter 30: The Remnants of the Devil Cult

“Evacuate! Rebels are attacking—devil-ridden, the lot of them!”

A member of the Royal Guard came rushing into the hall, shouting. I could hear the sounds of clashing steel and magical explosions in the distance, the walls and floor of the palace shaking as the destruction neared. The nobles were led out to safety, while the elite knights of the Royal Guard and the court magicians appeared, surrounding the king, Selene, and other members of the royal family.

“Really, ruining my daughter’s big day...”

You cultist bastards, I’ll never forgive you! I swore internally.

“Where did they come from?”

“It seems that one of the nobles invited to the palace led them inside!”

“I thought I’d stamped out any trace of the devil cultists within the nobility!”

The king gritted his teeth in frustration as Selene stood, frightened.

Three men appeared before us.

“Well, well. It’s wonderful to see you, Your Majesty.”

“Sir Levin! You were behind this?! Why?! And what has happened to you?!”

The man the king spoke to was the suspicious nobleman in gentleman’s clothing I’d seen a while before. But he looked even sicker than he had moments ago; the horns growing out of his head didn’t help. The mana-suppressing golden bracelet was gone. It must have been to hide his possession.

“Oh no. We of Marquis Ginius’s family have long struggled for power, aiming for even greater heights. One day, dukedom. No, to become the regents and have the country in our grasp! But...” Levin paused, an evil smile rising to his lips. “I realized. Dukedom, regency, each is too petty a station for me! I will become king!”

“And so, you led them here. Treason!”

“Yes! With the power of the devils, I will kill the king and use my might to take control of the country!”

“Come now. The promise was that you would leave the royals to me.”

The one who’d stopped the noble named Levin was an old man

with arms and legs like dead sticks, sunken eyes, and a hunched back. He was dressed in black priestly robes, with a nasty golden skull necklace hanging from his neck. I could feel mana even more sinister than his appearance radiating from him.

“The royal family’s precious blood! I will use the saintess’s pure flesh as a sacrifice to call forth a greater devil’s mana into my body! These ten years of anguish are a trial given to us by our glorious lords! We will revel in the sweetness of our retribution! And when I obtain the devil’s vast mana, I will finally attain immortality!”

The old man’s mind had been eaten away by the devil already in his body, and his delusions of immortality and the devil’s goal of summoning a greater devil had mixed. He had the most mana out of the three, so he might have taken in the mana of a number of demons already.

And lastly—

“Gah ha ha ha! Power! My power is overflowing! Come, you wenches! I’ll kill you this time!”

“...Who are you?”

“I don’t know anyone like this guy.”

“Mom, he’s that adventurer from the A-rank exam.”

Selene’s feeble voice prompted me to look closer, and I remembered that he was the adventurer from the exam that had left an impression with his rude and violent way of speech.

“Nick the Butcher?”

“Rock the Meat Cleaver! You humiliated me back then because I wasn’t strong enough! So these geezers gave me this devil power or whatever to become stronger!”

He *did* seem stronger—he looked bigger all around and kind of *burnt* all over. But getting possessed by a devil like that—

“A shortcut like that is a risky gamble, isn’t it?”

“Hrmph! You think the devil’s gonna take over my mind?! I’m not that soft! Now come on, let’s slaughter each other!”

He might not have been able to distinguish between his desire for revenge and his destructive impulses anymore.

“Teto. I’ll leave the musclebrain to you. But—”

“I know! I won’t let him touch a hair on Selene’s head!”

Teto pulled her sword out of the armband I’d made into a magic bag, charging at the possessed adventurer. The knights were protecting the king from the devil marquis. He probably hadn’t been strong from the get-go, but having the base mana pool of a high-ranking noble and adding a devil’s mana on top of it made him a match for the Royal Guard.

The old cult leader looked like the biggest pain, and he was giving Selene a filthy look, so—

“*Purification!*”

Raising the staff I took out of the armband magic bag, I cast a full-powered purification spell at the most annoying-seeming cultist leader.

Both the mana surrounding cursed items and the mana that devil-possessed people took in were just dense negative mana. That meant any spell that disassembled that mana worked against it.

“G-Gyaaaaahhh! My dreams of immortalityyy!”

I bathed the guy in maximum-strength purifying light. He must have been possessed for years, because not only had his mana been eaten away by the devil’s mana, but most of his body was contaminated with the foul stuff. The purifying light burnt him to a little pile of ashes topped by the awful skull necklace.

“Mom... Wasn’t that a bit too easy?”

“It’s fine. It’s not like I would have handled him any differently if he’d been a *regular* dried-up old creep stalking my daughter.”

I estimated that the man had over 50,000 MP total. The elderly court magician I’d spoken with in the library only had 20,000 to 30,000, so the cult founder must have had a pretty damn big mana pool. It would have been even harder dealing with him if he’d actually managed to add a greater devil’s mana to his current pool, so I dealt with him quick.

“Wha?! Impossible! The founder was defeated?!”

“Gramps kicked the bucket? Ha ha!”

The possessed marquis was shaken by the loss of his boss, while the B-rank adventurer was trading hits with Teto.

“Okay then, let’s finish off the devil marquis too.”

“T-Take this!”

He attacked with some kind of dark magic that conjured shadows around him, but I just spread the effect of *Purification* to sweep them away.

“I’ll follow in the founder’s footsteps and summon the greater devil myself! Then, I’ll become king!”

The dark magic had just been an attempt to distract the knights and I. The marquis had grabbed the skull necklace from the ashes of the cult founder, dashing behind Selene and trying to run her through with a sharp knife-hand strike, but—

“Wha?! Gyaaah!”

“I knew you were going to go after my precious daughter, so of course I came ready for that.”

I had discussed things with the king before all of this, so her dress and accessories were enchanted with defensive magic strong enough to make a national treasure blush, along with a barrier I’d cast on her right after word had come about their attack. And though he’d

managed to get through a couple layers of that barrier, hitting it had slowed down his outstretched arm enough for me to be able to slice it off with a blade of wind.

“Y-You! How dare you oppose this country’s future king?! I’ll kill you! I’ll kill you!”

“Don’t worry. You’ll either die here or be executed for treason.

Purification!”

“Gyaaah!”

Purifying the devil mana that he’d absorbed, the marquis started suffering like his body was being scratched away. His sickly pallor got a little better, and the horns on his head crumbled off. Using Appraisal magic to check out his status, the skills from his possession had vanished, and he was weakened. But it seemed that his change from human to demon was irreversible, because his race was still shown as “devilman.”

“Now, how is Teto doing?”

“Gaaah! My arms! My aaarrmmss!”

“You’re weaker than you were before. Come back later!”

While he’d gained astounding attack power with his unique skill and devil mana, his movements had gotten simpler. Teto had used her skills to handle his attacks, but after she decided she wouldn’t be able to learn anything from him, she quickly sliced off both of his arms.

“Uhegh... Something sticky is coming out of his arms...”

“This isn’t the end! I won’t let things end here!”

Devil mana was leaking from his stumps instead of blood. The dark and viscous mana overflowed, trying to form into arms to replace the ones he’d lost, but—

“This *is* the end. *Purification!*”

The spell annihilated his new, half-formed limbs, and he seemed to have regained his sense of pain after the devil mana was cleared away. He’d been possessed for a much shorter time compared to the marquis and cult founder, so his human senses must have been more or less working normally.

“Guards, take them away.”

The king ordered the devil marquis and the armless adventurer to be arrested. Just as we were about to mark the cultist attack as over, I felt a massive surge of mana from the skull necklace that the marquis had retrieved.

“Wait! *Barrier!*”

Right after I threw up a barrier to protect the guards who had rushed in, a blast of stale, sinister mana—a *miasma*, I suppose—overflowed from the necklace.

“Wh-what?! Stop! Don’t come any closer!”

“Ahh, my power, my power is getting sucked away! Stolen!”

That miasma surrounded the still-living marquis and adventurer, sucking out not only their mana but their life force, drying them up in seconds.

While Teto shielded Selene's eyes from the view, the king's knights and I guarded against the sinister mana as it materialized.

Chapter 31: The Advent of the Greater Devil

“I generously let my thralls possess you, and you still couldn’t prepare a proper sacrifice for me.”

What appeared was a dark humanoid covered in red patterns. Its hands and legs came to an abundance of sharp points, and curved horns grew from its head. It also had bat-like wings and a long, pointed tail.

“I wonder if that’s the cult’s greater devil?” I commented.

“Yes! I am he—the Archdevil!”

“Archdevil?!”

The greater devil that had shocked the king was a mana life-form with a physical form: a threat to everything in Ischea, going by its terrifying track record. Rank-wise, it would be either A+ or even S-rank.

“It says it’s an Archdevil, but it’s not even named. Kinda dulls the gravitas, there.”

“...You, girl. You don’t seem to understand how terrible I am!”

It sent waves of sinister mana at me, but I blocked them with a barrier.

Total mana-wise, it had about as much as all three of the possessed guys did together. Its ego might have been inside the awful golden necklace, stealthily guiding their thoughts. The manifested devil’s mana pool was on par with mine at about 100,000.

“Hmph, I can only use this much power when not fully materialized. No matter. I will sacrifice that pure maiden there and regain my true power!”

“Teto, just mess around and chip away at his mana for me. I’ll get things ready in the meantime.”

“Roger!”

Teto ran towards the Archdevil, bringing her blade down in a fell blow. It stopped her heavy hit with an arm, counterattacking with its off-hand. But Teto quickly dodged, attacking again from a different angle. Her Body Hardened attacks and mana-infused magic sword canceled out the devil’s magic, and I could tell its total mana was winnowing down.

“Now, the trick to devil fighting would be—*Holy Shot!*”

I took up a flanking position and shot balls of light at it from my

staff. As the devil was an impure being, smoke rose from the spots where the few dozen magic bullets filled with purification waves hit it.

“Gwooooah! Curse you, human!”

“A mana life-form’s physical body’s only as intact as its mana pool.”

Teto’s status didn’t list HP and MP separately, but combined them both into her Golem Core MP. The Archdevil used a similar consolidated pool. Plus, since it was supposed to be summoned with a sacrifice, its materialization was incomplete, throttling the amount of power it could use at once. A full materialization would have had five to ten times as much mana, making it difficult even for us.

“Gwoooahhh! Am I being overpowered?!”

“A-Amazing... So this is mom and Teto’s true strength...”

Selene, the king, and all of the guards were watching in shock as Teto and I overpowered the clearly terrifying Archdevil.

“My mana is disappearing! I cannot hold my form! But I am a devil! One day, I will descend upon this world once again, and take my revenge against you! Fwah ha ha ha ha!”

Unable to keep itself materialized under our attacks, the Archdevil cackled.

Mana life-forms were, aside from a few exceptions, nearly immortal. Even if the physical body it manifested in was destroyed, it would just return to the dimension devils came from. Lower-ranked devils had no wills, but high-ranking greater devils did, and would try to take revenge on us just as the devil had threatened us. The only problem was that by the time the Archdevil would be able to meddle with things in the physical world again, Selene and the king would be long gone, and it might attack Selene’s descendants or unrelated citizens.

“No way am I letting that happen. *Creation!*”

“Wha?! What is this magic...?!”

As the king stared at my magic in shock, the massive amount of mana I used took the form of a single jewel as the Creation Magic completed.

“Jewel of Sealing, seal away the Archdevil!”

“Wh-What is that?! G-Gwoahhh! I’m being sucked in!”

Using the mana crystals I’d set into the necklace I was wearing, I’d Created a gem that could bind the Archdevil, locking it inside as it tried to run. The clear crystal shone red as the devil was absorbed.

Then silence returned to the room, and I slid down onto the floor.

“Whew, it’s over! I’m exhausted~!”

“Mom!”

“Whoa... Selene. It’s okay. It must have been scary, but it’s all

over.”

Holding the Jewel of Sealing, I gently patted Selene on the head as she clung to me.

“Lady Wiiiitch! Praise Teto too!”

“Okay, okay. You did a good job holding the Archdevil back. Thank you.”

“Eh heh heh, Lady Witch praised me~!”

The Royal Guard were bewildered at how light the mood had become when only a moment ago the world was crashing down on their heads, and the guards who had come running as backup were perplexed by the lack of things to fight.

“Your Majesty. What happened to the rebels?”

“They’re gone.”

“Huh?”

“They’ve been defeated. Stay strictly on guard, and send guards to Levin’s mansion! Gather evidence against Levin and the devil cult, and destroy them completely this time!”

The remains of the cult and the Archdevil were gone, and everything was settling down.

“Chise. Is that devil within that gem?”

“Yeah, it’s sealed for now,” I answered the king’s question.

Magic tools that could capture mana life-forms like spirits and devils had existed since ancient times, so it shouldn’t have been odd for me to have one. The king looked suddenly pensive, contemplating a grim question; then he shook his head and asked a different one entirely.

“And what do you plan to do with it?”

“I’m going to manage it myself, so don’t worry about it.”

“...Fine. Please do.”

The king didn’t seem to accept my answer completely, but he left, murmuring his parting words. Then, Teto, Selene, and I headed back to Selene’s villa. Once we were sure that Selene had fallen asleep in her bed, Teto and I took the Jewel of Sealing back through the teleportation gate to the Wasteland of Nothingness.

“Ha ha ha. You know one day I’ll free myself from this seal—and when I do, I’ll core out that little girl of yours and make her broken husk my plaything!”

While the gem captured him, it wasn’t actually able to fully seal an Archdevil. It would degrade with time, and the archdevil inside might become able to break itself out once its mana had regenerated.

“You can’t imagine the place I have in mind for your safekeeping once I’ve had my fun! You will rue the day you crossed me!”

The Archdevil had already regenerated enough mana to speak to us telepathically from inside the jewel. Its mana regeneration skills

were amazing.

“Shut up. You’re actually gross. I want to smash that thing.”

“Teto, the devil would escape if you smashed it.”

“Oh yeah.”

As Teto and I chatted, we changed out of our party dresses and into our normal clothes. After checking to make sure I had mana crystals in my magic bag, we headed for the center of the Wasteland. There, the first home we lived in with Selene stood, now having become a little forest centered around the World Trees.

“You wenchies, what do you plan on doing, taking me here?”

“This should be a good spot. Creation!”

Spending 1,000,000 MP from the mana crystals, I created a mana converter. It disassembled magic stones and mana crystals before releasing the mana into the air.

“What is this device? It is useless to strengthen the seal! No matter how long it takes me, I will live again, and I will dine on your souls, no matter where the cycle of rebirth takes them!” mocked the Archdevil, still cackling away. But—

“Shut up already.”

“Right. That should do it. Bop!”

Setting the jewel the Archdevil was sealed in inside the device, I pressed the start button.

“Gwahhhh! My mana is being sucked away! My rebirth— Gwaaargh!”

“Ahh, looks like the mana conversion causes it pain. Whatever. Keep on truckin’. Let’s get home and get some sleep.”

“Got it!”

“Wait, what do you mean?! What do you mean by mana conversion?! Save me! I won’t think of revenge any longer! I don’t want to disappear; I don’t want to die! Stoooppp!”

The Archdevil sealed inside the gem began to be sucked dry of mana. The whole of its being was converted to raw, neutral mana and released into the atmosphere. It was killing two birds with one stone: destroying a normally immortal devil and renewing the Wasteland of Nothingness.

The Archdevil lost its own will in the first three years of agony from the mana conversion, eventually just spitting out more mana. When the device stopped around a hundred years later, it had been completely destroyed.

It was really a hell that even devils would run from.

Chapter 32: The Farewell I'd Known Would Come One Day

"This is the first dream oracle I've had in a while. Good evening, Liriel."

"Yes, good evening. Hee hee hee, you did great, Chise. My estimates for when the Wasteland will be regenerated have shrunk again! I'd be impressed if you'd just put down the devil's material incarnation; for you to wipe it out permanently and put its mana back into circulation—well, it defied all my expectations."

"It would've been annoying if we just drove it away; I figured we'd all have an easier time if it was gone for good."

"I'm always shocked at you humans and your imaginations. You probably did it this way because you didn't have enough mana to Create an immortal-slaying sword that could destroy it completely, but you still put it on the path to destruction."

It was a bit embarrassing for Liriel to smother me with praise.

"But I'd never thought you would get results this great."

The Wasteland's mana creation system was working perfectly, with the three-part set of trees, World Trees, and barrier tools set so that they would work fine so long as they received regular inspections.

"And it looks like the devil cult targeting that girl is gone completely."

"...Yeah. Selene's debut party is done, so she'll probably start living as a proper royal."

If she did, it'd be nice to commute back and forth between the capital and the Wasteland, watching over her until she became an adult.

After that, I used Creation Magic to make a table in the empty dimension, and after I got some tea and sweets ready, we had a simple tea party. It was a little "good work" party, to celebrate Selene's debut being over and done with.

Finally—

"Well then, I'll come again next time I get a chance. I'm looking forward to what you'll develop next."

Saying that, my tea party with the goddess ended, and I woke up absolutely drained of mana from the dream oracle. I spent the entire day resting.

And a few days later, once everything related to the attack had

been dealt with, we met with the king without Selene.

Just as Liriel had told me, they had confirmed that the cult was destroyed, and would be paying us for our guard work. Having fulfilled our end of the contract completely (or in actuality more than expected, seeing as we'd sealed away an Archdevil), Teto and I were rewarded with not only the rights to the Wasteland of Nothingness, but fifty truesilver pieces.

"Wait, isn't this too much?"

"No, it's the correct amount. This is what ten A-rank adventurers would be paid for battling an Archdevil and sealing it away, as my court magicians and I calculated. We've included the cost of the sealing jewel as well."

Apparently they were lowballing, seeing as they would have actually needed more than ten A-rank adventurers to take one down, along with a bonus for preparing to seal it.

"I see... We'll accept it with our thanks, then."

Getting our pay and my property rights, I heaved a long sigh.

Then, after a moment of silence between us all, the king spoke up.

"This is only if it's all right with you two, but. Chise, would you become a court magician, and Teto a knight of my Royal Guard?"

"Your Majesty..."

The prime minister and knight commander were shooting looks at the king, urging him to continue.

"And you see. You both could become my concubines one day. If you don't want that, could you think about getting engaged to my sons instead?"

It seemed he was trying to recruit us after seeing that our fighting power was past A-rank level. But other than that, there was lust in his eyes.

"If you're trying to be considerate to me as Selene's adopted mother, it's unnecessary. And we're free adventurers, so we don't want to be trapped as concubines. Or are you asking for another reason?"

When I asked him that back, the king smiled self-deprecatingly. "...While that's one reason, I seriously come onto a woman once I feel she's the one. I was struck by you ladies' beauty as you faced off against the Archdevil."

"That's... I don't even know what to say. Or wait, don't you love your queen and your other concubines?"

"I love them. My love is equal and endless!"

He should be handsome, so why do I feel like he's such a disappointment? And that endless love is targeted at me too?

"I'm serious."

"...I'm sorry. I have to decline."

"Teto isn't interested either."

After the two of us rebuffed him, the king slumped back against the sofa weakly. “Ha ha, you rejected me.”

He laughed, but he didn’t seem sad at all. I guessed people with a lot of love suffered a lot of rejections too. I wasn’t all that familiar with romantic love.

“Nothing I can do about it. I’ll have Aria console me tomorrow.”

Aria—the queen. Selene had talked a lot about her new stepmother when she came to us. She’d gotten attached to the queen after hearing her tell stories about Lady Elize, Selene’s birth mother.

“Hrm. I had been hoping that we could end things amicably, but... It’s a shame.”

The friendly mood that had filled the room vanished in an instant, and the king spoke with dignity and all the gravitas he could muster.

“—You have the Creation Magic skill.”

He’d witnessed me Create a Jewel of Sealing to protect Selene and seal away the Archdevil. I’d suspected he’d realized, but it turned out he really had.

“You lied about finding the teleportation gates and spirit vestige crystal in the Wasteland of Nothingness. That was camouflage to hide your Creation Magic.”

“...You’re right.”

Feeling it would be useless to stay silent or deny it when he was so sure, I took the offensive and confirmed it.

“Lady Witch...”

“It’s okay, Teto.”

As I soothed a worried Teto, the king had an extremely complicated look on his face.

“If you’d only simply accepted my offer to become a court mage, or live a life without using Creation Magic as the wife of a royal, I could have pretended I didn’t know.”

Our conversation a moment earlier must have been his attempt at being nice.

“Creation Magic is an extremely dangerous skill.”

“Yes, that’s true.”

In the hands of a bad actor, it could destroy not only as many people as the user wanted, but society itself. A surreptitious Creation of vast sums of money could topple economies; by similar means, one could outfit any motivated group to topple a nation.

Though a person with a normal mana pool would have a limit to the things they could make with Creation Magic, the king already knew that I’d made precious tools like teleportation gates, spirit vestige crystals, and Jewels of Sealing. If he looked into my past, there was a chance he’d discover that the sacred sword I’d given to Arsus was another one of my creations.

“I don’t want to have to eliminate my daughter’s savior. And if another country or organization learns about the existence of your Creation Magic, Selene will likely be targeted regardless.”

Every person dear to someone with Creation Magic was a potential hostage to outside parties hungry for their power, and Selene was at the top of that list for me.

We’d *just* been able to stop the devil cultists from targeting her, but there was a chance that my magic would make her a target once again. The skill that I’d chosen upon my reincarnation for my survival’s sake was going to be the thing that forced me to part from my beloved adopted daughter.

“...I understand. Teto and I will leave.”

“...I’m sorry.”

After leaving a certain something with the king and deactivating the teleportation gate, we left Ischea’s capital.

Selene’s Side

My debut as a member of the royal family and the devil cult’s attack came and went as expected, like clockwork. Things were getting back to normal after everything had been settled. After my debut, every day was busy.

“Selene, if you have money or power, you must never abuse it. When you use it, you need to think about why you’re doing it from a logical standpoint, why you’re doing it from an emotional standpoint, and what effect it will have.”

Chise’s words counted not only for magical power, but also my influence as a royal.

During my studies as a member of the royal family, I learned carefully, point by point, all the ways that growing up like a commoner made me different from a normal princess, before they could turn into real problems. But the advanced healing magic and broader curriculum that I’d learned thanks to Mom helped a lot.

After that, I gradually got more used to living as a royal, as if making up for lost time. I chatted with father, spoke with the queen who knew mother, and got to meet mother for the first time by going to see her grave. I got friendly with my paternal siblings, and every time I felt like it was really okay for me to be there as a royal, the time I spent with mom and Teto shrunk.

It was a little lonely. There were some aspects of royal life that I couldn’t get used to. But I always had that relief that thanks to the teleportation gate, I was always connected to the home where I lived with mom and Teto. I had wished that they would stay with me if they could.

And one day, when mom and Teto had come to speak with father, the teleportation gate stopped working.

“Huh? Why...? Why can’t I get home?”

I’d reached towards the gate like normal, but I couldn’t get back to my house in the Wasteland.

“...Selene. Chise left you a letter.”

With shaking hands, I took mom’s letter, tears overflowing as I read it out loud.

“Dear Selene.

You aren’t in danger from the devil cult anymore, and your debut as a royal is over.

I had wanted to watch over you until you became an adult, but for reasons beyond my control, I have to relinquish that job to His Majesty the King.

You have lots of people around you. The king and queen, your paternal siblings, your knights and maids. You’ve even got the nuns at the clinic, if you go down to the lower city. From now on, they’ll raise and guide you.

Because you’re now a royal, having adventurers of unknown birth like Teto and I around you will end up casting a shadow over your bright future, so I think it’s best we aren’t there. That is why I turned off the gate.”

“So I can’t go home? I can’t go home to the house where I lived with Mom and Teto? I can’t go home to Mom?!”

I couldn’t stop my tears at the sudden goodbye. I flipped to the next page.

“Selene. Teto and I had lots of fun these last twelve years. It was my first time being a mother, so I think I probably didn’t act like much of one. And since I worked as an adventurer, I couldn’t say with confidence that I was a good replacement. Even now, I worry about whether what I’ve taught you was right.”

“She thought like that...? But mom is my only mom!”

I kept reading.

“I’ve left some gifts for you with the king. The first is a danger-detecting necklace. It was a cursed accessory that we found in a dungeon in the past, whose curse we had purified. The color changes when danger approaches. Use it when you’re not sure who to depend on.”

“Mom...”

As I read that part of the letter, the prime minister took out the accessories that Mom had left for me. One was the necklace she’d written about. The other one was a simple ring-shaped magic tool.

“The other ring is a tool I made. I can’t tell you what it does in detail, but it will save the person who should be holding it when they’re really at the end of their rope. If someday you’re really, really in trouble, I’ll come

running, no matter where you are.”

I'd thought I'd never see her again, but if I had that ring, I'd be connected to her.

“Lastly.

Selene. I love you. Be happy.”

Those last words, the grief of her vanishing for good while I wasn't looking, and the sheer extent of her love for me—they were all decent reasons to start crying and never stop. Father and the others just quietly watched over me.

Chapter 33: Repeating Meetings and Farewells

Teto and I turned off the teleportation gate that was connected to Selene's villa, collected the gate that we'd kept in a house in the capital, and moved out.

The A-rank exams were over, and Selene was living with her real family. Thinking that if me and my Creation Magic were near Selene, she'd be in more danger, we left the capital after saying our farewells across the city.

"Lady Witch. What was that ring you left for Selene?" Teto asked as we were leaving the city.

"Oh, that? It was a protection ring I made with Creation Magic."

It was a high performance tool; it sucked mana bit by bit from its surroundings, and when danger struck, it'd use the mana it had collected to dispel poison, throw up a barrier, and heal.

What's more, if she was really, *really* in trouble, it would forcefully teleport her back to our house in the Wasteland of Nothingness and contact me. So basically, it was an emergency escape device.

"It's something for Selene when she's in trouble."

"Mrrgh. I'm jealous that you only gave something like that to Selene."

"You don't need one, since we're always together, right?"

I chided Teto for her childlike jealousy, but it still seemed like she was jealous that Selene got something I'd Created.

"I'm still jealous."

"Then I'll Create something for you next time."

"Really? Yay!"

My Creation Magic had been discovered. It would probably be best for us to lie low in the Wasteland of Nothingness for a while.

"It'll be lonely," Teto murmured, looking back at the capital.

"Yeah. But this thing is going to happen a lot over our lives. We've gotta get back to the Wasteland for now. *Teleport!*"

After I replied to her softly, we left the capital and walked for a bit until we got to a point where no one could see us. Then, I cast a teleportation spell. With a little floaty feeling, our surroundings changed, and we arrived in front of our house surrounded by trees.

"I used mana crystals, since I didn't have enough mana to go one

way from the capital to the Wasteland on my own, but that was rough...”

I squatted down on the ground, exhausted from the feeling of actually losing so much mana in a while.

A one-way trip ran me around 3,000,000 MP. It wasn't something I could use often. And it had limitations, like needing to have been at the spot where you were going at least once, or requiring coordinates or something to act as a landmark. For example, I could teleport somewhere I was used to, or to Selene's ring.

“Okay. We're home, but it feels weird.”

We relaxed here every day, but arriving in front of the house when we came home felt different than going home through the gate.

“We're home.”

“We're home!”

Hearing our voices, the bear golems who'd been working out in the garden came to see us, looking confused. I giggled when I saw that.

“...Lady Witch?”

Teto said my name, but I ignored her and circled around to the back of the house where the garden and laundry were. Closing my eyes, I remembered harvesting veggies with Selene here, and hanging laundry out to dry with her.

Going inside the house, I caressed the kitchen counter where we'd cooked together and the table where we'd celebrated her birthday. On the shelf by the window was the magical camera tool we'd given her, a photo of the three of us having our picnic, and the doggy plush named Harry she'd always cherished.

“Ah, Selene's important things are still here... We'll have to send them over.”

Grabbing the faded plush Harry and the photo, I took a step towards the teleportation gate connected to the palace before stopping.

Any evidence that Selene knew me with my Creation Magic would put her in danger. That was why I'd decided that leaving her would make her happier. I knew I wasn't wrong, so I'd remotely destroyed the gate connected to the palace.

But even so, my regret just kept growing.

Leaving Selene made me feel...lonely and sad. Really, I wanted to be with her longer. I wanted to watch her grow older. I hadn't wanted to say goodbye like this. I couldn't stop my feelings.

In our house filled with memories of Selene, clutching her things to my chest, I crumbled to the ground weeping as Teto held me up.



“It’s okay to cry, Lady Witch. It’s okay to cry.”

“Aah... Aaah!”

I tried to hold back my sobs, along with the regret bubbling up inside me at my choice. I ended up passing out asleep in Teto’s arms as she comforted me.

The next morning, when I woke up, I cast preservation magic over the entire house filled with my memories with Selene.

It was lonely, saying goodbye to her.

I was unaging, and we had no idea how long a golem girl like Teto would live. We’d have many meetings, farewells, and changes in the future. Those changes would probably excite us sometimes, or make us grieve. That was why, while we could hold the memories that supported us dearly, we had to move on.

“Okay. We’ve come back before winter, so let’s rest until spring and work hard next year.”

“Roger!”

We might sometimes stop to prop ourselves up with our memories, but we would have to keep walking on our long journey through life.

Six years later, we stood atop the bell tower of the royal capital of Ischea’s church, looking down. We could see people cheering, saying congratulations.

That day, a new couple was having their wedding.

“She’s beautiful, Teto.”

“She is! Selene really has gotten so beautiful!”

It was our daughter’s wedding. She’d been safe for the last six years. Lots of people had supported her, and her ring hadn’t been activated even once.

Her groom was the son of Margrave Liebel, whose margravate was near the border of the Wasteland of Nothingness.

Selene had an abundance of reasons for marrying into the Liebel family. There were lots of monsters on their land, which was also close to the border to Gald. Selene wouldn’t have been able to settle for a partner prejudiced against beastmen. Since they fought a lot of monsters out near the border, they needed someone who could use advanced healing magic. The margravate was also near the Wasteland of Nothingness, still not far from where we lived.

“I’m happy that she’s become a proper lady.”

Seeing an adult Selene dressed up in a gorgeous wedding dress made me happy. But at the same time, the fact that I hadn’t been able to see her bloom into a lady from close up, and that she and her chest had outstripped me, made me feel lonely.

“It’s wonderful. I should give her my gift now. *Illusion!*”

I aimed the spell over the church steps, raining phantom flowers down.

As a storm of falling blossoms blessed the newlyweds as they walked out, the people around them cried out in wonder.

“...Mom? Big sis Teto?”

And as Selene and her groom looked up to see where the illusory blossoms were raining from, their eyes fell on Teto and I as we looked down from the bell tower.



“Congratulations, Selene.”

“Congratulations!”

I delivered our words of congratulations to Selene’s ears only.

“Thank you for coming, mom, big sis.”

After picking up Selene’s thanks with magic, Teto and I teleported away. Then, the wonderful newlyweds had a wedding ceremony, blessed by many.

Extra Story: Selene's Monologue

After my debut as a royal, my mom, Chise, and my big sister, Teto, vanished. They left a letter with father and closed the teleportation gate that connected to the home where they raised me.

“Mom... Teto...”

I knew the time would come eventually. But it was just too sudden, and I spent three days and nights shut in my room, sobbing. The maids and guard knights who knew about my situation tried to talk to me out of worry, and father and my new mother Queen Aria came all the way to my room to check on me. I would cry until I fell asleep, wake up, and start crying again when I noticed mom wasn't there.

And on the fourth morning, I realized...I was hungry.

“Oh yeah. Tomorrow comes...”

As I whispered that, I remembered something from when I was little. I'd had a fight with a friend at nursery school in Gald. I'd be dropped off there in the morning and picked up at sunset, and I played with the same kids. I'd fought with my friend, and then left when mom came to pick me up.

I'd felt so broken up and ashamed about the fight that I lost my appetite. I cried all night, and told mom I didn't want to go back to nursery school.

“Mom, I'm hungry...”

“Okay. Then let's eat.”

“Lady Witch~! Teto wants fluffy, melty, sweet bread!”

“Okay, okay. I'll make French toast then, with lots of honey.”

Back then, I had to look up at mom's back, waiting for breakfast to be done so the three of us could eat our fluffy, melty, sweet bread.

“Selene. No matter how sad you are, or how hard it is, tomorrow always comes. That's why you need to live in a way you won't regret, puffing your chest out proudly at Mr. Sun.”

As I rushed to eat my bread, mom just gently chided me. I hadn't understood what she meant at the time, but I knew I couldn't worry about the fight I'd had forever. I gave my friend a proper apology the next time I saw her. My friend apologized too, and we made up.

If I hadn't apologized back then, would my friend have apologized? Or would we go on without either of us apologizing, just feeling awful?

“I’ll face the sun and live in a way I won’t regret.”

Now, I thought I understood what mom was saying a little bit.

I couldn’t help feeling sad. But I couldn’t just keep using mom and Teto as a reason to coop myself up.

“I’ll eat. Then, I’ll apologize to everyone who worried about me, and try my best.”

I wouldn’t be able to face mom, Teto, and my mother Elize if I had my head hung all the time.

Healing my red eyes with my own magic, I left my room and apologized to everyone. I returned to my studies and kept volunteering at the church.

I learned about tea parties, evening parties, how to speak, and trends from my teachers and the queen, but I wasn’t very good at all that after living with mom and Teto. If I had to choose, I found that I liked the sciences that mom taught me better, and I had father find me teachers to teach me more technical things. But when I told them about what mom had taught me daily, they looked as if they had revelations, and started analyzing things. I was shocked, and I found it weird.

“Really, though, where did mom’s knowledge come from...?”

Understanding once again how amazing mom was, I did the bare minimum tea- and party-wise as could be expected of a royal from my circumstances, focusing on my work with the church. There, I became friends with some newbie nuns around my age and taught them healing magic, working together with them at the clinic.

There, a death shocked one of my friends.

The whole point of my magic was to stem death’s advance as much as I could, and when I couldn’t do that, I healed so my patients would go peacefully with as little pain as possible. One of the patients my friend was in charge of had their wounds healed, but they didn’t improve, and passed away. After that, the nuns at the clinic and I thought about what had caused it, and how to deal with it if the same thing happened again. Sometimes, I called in anatomists to study with us.

“I have to use my power and position as a royal in a way that won’t shame me.”

Calling in all those talented scholars was one of the rare times I’d gone to such lengths as to invoke my royal title. I didn’t do it out of selfishness, but because it was necessary to raise the chances that we could save someone. I used my position knowing that if I didn’t do it, no one would.

Cardinal Marius, who’d been watching over us, let us look at the church’s grimoire too. Then we focused on the *Bless* spell that was explained inside, which let you strengthen another person physically.

By using it with precision and strengthening patients with our own mana, we were able to improve their healing later.

Once upon a time, mom had rubbed my back when I got sick riding in a carriage, and my sickness had disappeared. She'd told me that she just strengthened the bit that was making me sick from the outside, but it was amazing that she'd been able to learn how to do it from feeling alone.

And so, we aimed to create a standard spell that anyone could use. At the beginning, we struggled with weakening *Bless* and making it accessible. Since it was a spell to strengthen someone in battle, it took a lot of mana to cast. But by reining in the effect and narrowing the target area, we were able to chip the cost down to 500 mana per cast, creating *Lesser Bless*.

Lesser Bless let us strengthen a patient's weakened digestive systems after being hurt or sick, helping them absorb nutrients from food better after being healed. The spell and the way we used it saved elders and people who were born with weak organs. Having been at the center of its development, I was named as a new saintess by the Church of the Five Great Goddesses at age fourteen, and received a copy of the church's grimoire.

It was then that I met a certain someone who'd come to see the birth of a new saintess.

"A pleasure to meet you, Princess Seleneriel. I am Paulo, a priest."

"It's a pleasure to meet you as well, Father Paulo. Thank you for meeting with me today."

I had wanted to know more about how mom had saved an orphanage she was involved with in Dungeon City, back before she raised me. Father Paulo, who'd been in charge of the church in Apanemis, had come to the capital to introduce his successor to Cardinal Marius.

I then asked the cardinal to give me a chance to talk to Father Paulo and his well-built male successor. I got to learn about things I didn't know about mom—things that certainly *sounded* familiar.

I giggled as I heard about her setting the orphans up to be able to work, which came off as textbook Chise behavior, and got a little bit jealous imagining Teto surrounded and playing with lots of kids. I also learned that Father Paulo's successor was a former adventurer, and that he'd seen mom and Teto in battle; the tale that followed wound me up like you wouldn't believe.

I heard for the first time that mom had stood against a dungeon stampede. She'd spent a week in the dungeon fighting her first defensive battle, and she had amazed her cohorts with her magical stamina, resolve to detachedly keep shooting down monsters, and her courage not to run away when stronger ones came out.

While I was having fun there, father and my brothers were picking out a fiancé for me. Doing it at fourteen was a bit late for a royal, but it was only natural, given my situation. Most of the superior male nobles were already engaged too.

“Well, I don’t really care if I don’t get married...”

It was fun helping at the church, and I figured once I hit a certain age I could just join them there. Plus, I had the same amount of mana as the elderly court magician at 30,000, so I’d probably live to be more than a hundred. When I told my personal maids that I was kind of giving up on getting married, one of them cried.

“It is my dream to hold your children in my arms one day, Princess! Please, don’t say something like that!”

“S-Sorry.”

And so, while I was busy with helping at the church and studying to improve magic, my fiancé was chosen. It was Lord Vaise, the eldest son of Margrave Liebel. The margravate had special authority and military power thanks to being near the border. They were a key noble family who suppressed the Mubad Empire and demons to the north and the small countries in the northwest, and had proven themselves a shrewd bunch in their commercial relations with their neighbor states.

“I think I might get along fine with Lord Vaise.”

When I was little, mom had trained me in magic while Teto had taught me Body Hardening to protect myself, and even now I made sure not to get rusty. I was a tomboy of a princess, but that was a plus point for the margravate, being a military family. I had a lot of mixed feelings when I thought back to how they welcomed me.

Mom, Teto: I wish you would’ve raised me to be a little girlier back when I was a kid. Sometimes I worried that Lord Vaise might get sick of having such a butch fiancée.

While that was how my fiancé had been chosen, it ended up blessing me with a happy coincidence.

“Huh? Princess Selene’s adopted mother was Chise the Ogre Killer?! Then the baby she’d come to town with is our young master’s fiancée?!”

Lord Vaise’s guard was a former adventurer named Lyle, who’d known mom and Teto when they’d first started out as adventurers. I was shocked to hear that she’d slaughtered ogres that had appeared in the forest. I also learned that Lyle had met me as a baby, back at the adventurers’ guild.

What’s more, Lord Vaise introduced me to a purveyor of goods from a certain village.

“Huh?! You were raised by Miss Chise?! I’m gonna have to give you a lot of freebies!”

Once upon a time, mom and Teto had taken a quest to help settle a village, and the bubbleleaf that she'd had on her eventually became the high quality soap that was the villages' specialty. The smell of their soap reminded me of the soap I used to bathe with back in that dried up Wasteland. I also got to hear lots of stories about mom from the pioneer village, and went to bed surrounded by the scent of bubbleleaf.

Finally, at the party the night before my wedding—

"It's been a long time, Princess Seleneriel."

"Yes, it's nice to see you, Prince Gyunton."

While my fiancé Lord Vaise and I were chatting, the third prince of the Gald Beastman Nation and diplomat Prince Gyunton came to speak to me.

"I'm glad that the little girl I met back then has grown into a fine lady."

"Thank you."

"I'm also glad that a lady so sympathetic to my people is marrying into the Liebel Margravate," he continued, his fierce face softening. "And about Lady Chise..."

When I gripped my hand tightly in front of my chest as Prince Gyunton lowered his voice, my fiancé gently squeezed it. I'd always thought it would be bad to check up on mom after she'd left me with my father, so I had done my best not to ask about her up until then, but I really did want to know.

"She withdrew to the Wasteland for about a year after leaving you, and traveled Gald taking quests after that. Apparently she was a busybody everywhere she went," Prince Gyunton continued with a smile, which made me relax, smiling at how much that sounded like her.

If she'd been in Gald, then she probably wouldn't be coming to my wedding the next day.

Late that night, when I couldn't sleep, I stepped in front of the teleportation gate. The one in my villa had been broken ever since they left, and they'd also taken the one they had in their house in the capital. Sometimes, I dreamed that the disconnected gate worked again, and mom and Teto were waiting for me back in our house.

"Mom, Teto, I want to see you..."

I wanted them to come to my wedding. Thinking that, I let my wish slip towards the gate. I wrapped my left hand around my right hand, which had the mythrill and unicorn horn ring that my mother Elize had left me, and the ring mom had given me, and prayed.

If it was possible, I wanted to see them. But since I didn't know where they were, I couldn't call for them, and considering my position, I couldn't meet them easily.

And so, the day of my wedding arrived.

“Father Alberd, mother Aria. I’m getting married today.”

At the wedding venue, I greeted my parents. Lots of people were congratulating me, but I still felt a little loneliness in the bottom of my heart.

I wanted to see mom and Teto again.

Putting a lid on my feelings, the wedding went off without a hitch. Then, as we were leaving the church, a ton of flowers started falling.

“Flowers?”

I held out my hand, not remembering planning anything like that, and the phantom flower slipped through my hand. My eyes traced back over the path it had taken to the bell tower, and I saw a girl in a familiar witch’s hat and black robe summoning the illusory flowers from her staff, with a healthy-looking, beautiful tan girl by her side.

“...Mom? Big sis Teto?”

When I whispered their names, my fiancé...no, my *husband* put an arm around my waist and looked up at the bell tower with me, and a gust of wind passed by my ear.

“Congratulations, Selene.”

“Congratulations!”

Mom had sent her words down so that only I could hear.

“Thank you for coming, mom, big sis.”

She must have heard what I said too. Smiling, the two of them teleported away.

While I wished they would’ve stayed until the end, I knew I couldn’t be too selfish. This day was the happiest day of my life, so good that I could never wish for anything better.

“Mom, sis, I love you.”

Afterword

To new readers and old readers, hello. This is Aloha Zachou.

I'd like to give my biggest thanks to everyone who picked this book up, my editor I-san, Tetubuta-sama for the lovely illustrations he drew for the series, and everyone online who looked at my work before it was published as a book.

This is my first afterword in a while, so I'm going to talk about the last volume for a little bit.

The web version of part two originally didn't have much to it, so it went through extensive revisions. The writer himself got a bit too carried away with improving things, and ended up nearly hitting the page limit. There weren't enough pages left to do an afterword, so I had to send the book off with a heavy heart. If anyone had been looking forward to the afterword, I'm sorry.

Continuing on with volume three, while the web version of this part was well received, there were many readers who didn't quite agree with how it played out. Some issues were pointed out to me personally, and with those opinions and feedback, plus my editor I-san's comments, I edited the text to something that'll satisfy people.

Also, the bear golems who appeared in volume three were from rejected Teto designs back when Tetubuta-sama was designing her. In the proposed early designs, she had a number of different hair styles. We were going to have her hair reflected in her golem form too, so when I saw her hair in buns, with the golem design having ears, I honestly thought it was a pity.

Thinking about Teto's character, her hairstyle ended up with a combination of idiot hair and short pigtails that looked similar to a lively golden retriever with droopy ears, but I'd wished I could use the charming bear golem design too, so I'm happy I was able to do it this volume.

Making Magic is a story about Chise, the unaging witch, and her story continues after the meetings and farewells of this volume. I'd love for you all to keep watching over her and Teto's journey.

I—Aloha Zachou—look forward to your continued support.

Lastly, I'd like to thank every reader who picked this book up once more.



Making Magic

Aloha Zachou
illust. Tetubuta

The Sweet Life of a Witch Who Knows an Infinite MP Loophole **Volume 3**







Bonus Short Story

Little Selene's Big Adventure

As a toddler, Selene learned lots of things while playing.

"Let's go play today, everyone!"

"Goooh!"

With a big smile on her face, Selene took her clay golem companions out to explore.

"Be careful!"

"Make sure you're back for supper!"

"See you later mama, Teto!"

The little girl responded cheerfully, walking through the level grove and finding lots of things.

"A yellow flower! I'm gonna give it to mama and Teto."

She picked the flower out of the dirt, gripping it in her hand as she walked farther through the trees. She couldn't get very far with her little toddler legs, but she pushed herself just a bit harder, making it to the edge of the grove.

"It's all brown..."

As she stared in amazement at the sprawling wasteland outside of the grove, little Selene knew she shouldn't go any farther.

"Goh, goh!"

"Hmm... What about this way?"

Her golem attendants did everything they could to try to signal her to go back the way she came, but Selene didn't notice, walking along the outer edge of the little wood. Disappointed that they couldn't get through to her, the golems quickly followed behind. As the tiny girl and her exploration party walked along the borderline, they found a little font of water.

"Wow, water!"

Water and sand flowed up from a little depression in the ground as fast as the dry wasteland sucked it up, feeding a little bit of undergrowth on the wooded side of the borderline.

"Pretty sand! And cold water!"

Thinking she'd be scolded if she got them dirty, she took off her clothes and shoes before hopping in the spring. The golems rushed to collect her things as she scooped up some water and sand in her little hands, finding a nice rock.

"Wah, it's so pretty... I wonder if there are any more?"

After gazing towards the sun through the clear stone, Selene began her search for other pretty rocks. Single-mindedly, she combed through the sand, finding a second, and then a third, before realizing that her hands and feet were chilled.

“My hands are cold...”

Shaking the water off of herself, the little girl got dressed, settling her chilly body against a tree trunk to sunbathe.

“Warm...”

Clutching her yellow flower and pretty rock in her hands, her body warmed up, and she nodded off against the tree.

“Goh...”

Not wanting to wake her up, the golems touched a finger to their faces, mimicking a shushing movement at each other as they disassembled themselves, taking out a hidden blanket to cover Selene up with. They stayed by the girl’s side, watching over her afternoon nap by the spring as one golem doubled back to the house to call for Chise and Teto.

“Oh, Selene. You came out this far? Ah, she’s sleeping.”

“What did she pick up today?”

Teto and I peered down at Selene as she napped against the tree and saw that she was holding a wilted yellow flower and a pretty stone—a raw crystal. The two of us smiled, imagining her picking the flower, finding the stone in the spring, and falling asleep from exhaustion afterwards.

“Teto, let’s carry her home.”

“Okay. I can’t wait to ask her how her day went!”

I knew Selene would be sad to find that the yellow flower she’d picked had wilted already, so I cast a bit of healing magic on it to bring it back to life. Then I put the sleeping toddler on my back as Teto carried the flower and crystal, and we headed on back home with the golems who’d been watching her. I would put the flower in a vase on the table when we got back to the house, excited to hear all about Selene’s little adventure.



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Making Magic: The Sweet Life of a Witch Who Knows an Infinite
MP Loophole Volume 3
by Aloha Zachou

Translated by Emily Hemphill
Edited by Will Holcomb

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